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G. W. CARLETON & CO., Publishers,
New York.

COMPENSATION.

A

STUDY OF EXPERIENCE.

BY

CELIA E. GARDNER,

AUTHOR OF

“STOLEN WATERS,” “BROKEN DREAMS,” “TERRACE ROSES,”
“A WOMAN’S WILES,” “RICH MEDWAY’S TWO LOVES,”
“EVERY INCH A KING,” “TESTED,”
ETC., ETC.

“A human spirit here records
The annals of its human strife ;
A human hand hath touched these chords ;
This tale may all be idle words—
But yet—it once was life.”

LORD LYTTON.

33 “For one shall grasp, and one resign ;
One drink life’s rue, and one its wine ;
And God shall make the balance good.”
J. G. WHITTIER.

W. J.

4942 P.

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1880

SAMUEL STODDER,
STEREOTYPER,
90 ANN STREET, N. Y.

TROW
PRINTING AND BOOK-BINDING CO.
N. Y.

CONSECRATION.

“ I work my work—all its results are Thine.

I know the loyal deed becomes a fact
Which Thou wilt deal with: nor will I repine

Although I miss the value of the act.
Thou carest for Thy creatures; and the end
Thou seest. The world unto Thy hands I leave:
And to Thy hands”—*my work*.

DEDICATION.

TO

H. H.

FRIEND of my heart ! I've shut within these leaves

Many a thought which Memory still weaves

About thy name.

And through this tale—not “ idle words ” the whole—

I still would speak to thee, as soul to soul,

In words of flame.

Words that shall light anew the subtle fires

Of sympathy, and long repressed desires,

Which burn and glow

Beneath the careless semblance that we keep ;

And which shall span, with sudden, thrilling leap,

The years' dull flow.

I write of “ dreams ” which perished with the flowers ;

And thou'lt recall one brief, sweet dream of ours

That died like these.

I write of "drifting" down a summer stream ;
And thou'lt remember days when we too seem
 O'er strange, bright seas
T' have slowly floated with the hours' swift tide,
Our oars thrown by, and whither we might glide
 Scarce caring aught,
So that together we might linger still,
Each bright, glad moment, as it sped, to fill
 With loving thought.

I write of "life's deep problems" solved with pain ;
And thou wilt think, with tender thrill again,
 Of sweet, still hours,
 Embalmed with flowers,
Told off by heart-beats, counted by the light
Of conscious eyes, and all too swift in flight.

I write of "mem'ry ;" "hope ;" and "faith ;" and "prayer ;"
Of hours of "waiting ;" hours of blank "despair ;"
 And "love's" mad thrall.
For many a passion of the human heart
Has in this idle tale of mine found part ;
 While through it all
An undertone of meaning deep doth run ;
But which shall speak, in language plain, to one
 Who reads my heart
 In every part,

And comprehends my scarcely uttered thought,
As he doth read the book my pen hath wrought.

And so in *his* kind hands my book I place !
And o'er it he will bend the tender face

I know so well ;

And with his hand upon my pulse's beat,
His heart will list the story, sad or sweet,

Which each page tells.

And memory to him shall softly breathe
Of fair, dead hours, which he will sadly wreath

With immortelles,

And *asphodels*.

1879.

C. E. G.

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PART FIRST.

TIME: PLACE: PERSONS.

COMPENSATION.



PART FIRST.

TIME : PLACE : PERSONS.



L

“The world is wide ; but oh how sad
It seems when I remember !”



NIGHT in the mountains ! Silent, dewy night ;
Sweet with the breath of pine, and blooming grape,
And the aroma of a thousand flowers ;
And peaceful as the far Acadian glades,
Ere voice of man disturbed those primal shades.

Night in the mountains ! Tier on tier they rise,
Up-reaching eager and ambitious hands

To touch the smiling heavens, that seem to bend
With tender pity tow'rd the swaying earth.
Wrapped in a filmy vail of evening mist,
Their proud, majestic forms seem scarce more near,
And not so real as yon swift-sailing cloud
Flying before the fast pursuing moon.
And, gazing on their outlines, dim and faint,
I marvel if indeed 'twere true that I
On this same morn stood on yon lofty peak,
And gazed with rapture on the broad expanse
Of mountain, valley, plain, and hilly slope,
Which spread before, beneath me. Where are now
The trees which shook their tender leaflets then
In th' morning breeze, whose cool and balmy breath
Was laden with the scent of res'nous pine,
And aromatic fir, and pungent spruce,
Caught with the kisses which it, passing, gave
To that dark wood a hundred feet below?
Where are the giant oaks, that towered high;
The wide-spread maples, beech, and weeping elms;
The budding chestnuts, and the blooming limes—
All wearing that luxuriant robe of green
With which sweet Summer loves to deck the woods—
And stretching kindly arms above our heads,

To shield us from the rays of June's warm sun ?
Where are the rocks, moss-covered, lichen-grown,
Shielding, in many a cleft, from boisterous wind,
The frail, yet hardy tufts of feathery fern,
And piled so high, in massive, rough-hewn blocks—
A grander throne than monarch ever owned ?
Where is the silver stream, which pensively
Flowed through the dim and silent wood, anon
Broad'ning to placid pool, or limpid lake,
Then dashing madly down the mountain-side,
Foaming and roaring, in its stress of wrath,
At each wild leap from beetling cliff to cliff ?
Are they all there, behind the floating veil
Of pale blue mist, in which the modest mounts
Have wrapped themselves for sleep ? or has some foe,
With sudden onslaught, laid the fair trees low,
Powdered the rocks, and drunk the streamlet up,
And left the mighty mountains bald and bare,
As in this dim, pale light they now appear ?
In morning's glow the truth will stand revealed,
And show what now is by the mist concealed.

Night in the mountains ! Still, and pure, and sweet,
The evening breezes steal about us here,

And in a dewy mantle wrap us close.
We sit in silence in the broad, deep porch
Of this most modest dwelling-place, which crests
One lofty mount, and nestles at the feet
Of others loftier still, and list the sounds
Which, through the hush of night, float hitherward :
The whisp'ring leaves, coquetting with the breeze,
Disturbing with their talk the weary birds,
Which, cradled on the rocking boughs, protest,
In sharp, shrill chirps, against their broken rest ;
The roses, sighing forth their soft complaints,
That night should hide their lovely faces thus
From an admiring world ; the cheerful chirp
Of cricket from some fav'rite nook ; the hoarse,
Discordant croak of solemn frogs ; the song
Of flowing brooklet, telling merry tales
Of all the loveliness of spreading lake—
Garnished with lilies, edged with bracken fine,
O'ershadowed by the bending forest trees,
And mirroring the sweet-faced briar-rose,
Far up the mountain whence it babbling flows.

We are in shade; but full two hundred feet
Beneath us, bathed in moonlight, silver-pale,

A smiling valley like a picture sleeps :
With fertile fields and meadows ; groves of pine
And hemlock, casting shadows black and weird
Upon the moon-lit plains ; with here and there
Huge clumps of lighter, tend'rer-foliaged trees,
And tow'ring hills, which from this altitude
Seem but as swelling mounds on meadow breast ;
And homesteads fair, engirdled 'round with trees,
And gleaming white, touched by the moonbeam's glint ;
And uplands, sloping high and higher still,
Until at last they reach the feet of mounts,
Which, tall and grim, like faithful sentries stand
And shut the valley in on every hand.

The scene is lovelier than pen can paint !
The play of light and shade, as silently
The moon pursues her way, and shifts her place,
Or hides a moment 'neath light-sailing clouds,
No artist could transfix. And we who sit
In this deep porch—with roses clustered o'er,
And all the night air fragrant with their breath—
Listen and gaze in silence.

We are three:

A man of business, snatching from the toil

And turmoil of his busy daily round,
A few sweet hours of perfect change and rest;
Made sweeter by the dear companionship
Of her who nestles closely at his side,
Her sunny head upon his shoulder broad ;
Of her with whom he wanders hand in hand
Through forest aisles, or climbs the rugged mounts,
Or sits content beside some woodland fount,
And dreams away the golden summer days—
His lovely, orphaned daughter. Rare, indeed,
To him, the busy man, are days like these,
And nights on which God seems to set the seal
And charm of perfect loveliness. These two,
And I, a wearied author, seeking here
Rest for an o'er-tasked frame, an o'er-wrought brain,
Among the cool and dewy solitudes
Of these fair mountain wilds.

Aye, rest indeed

I stand in need of finding ; for the year
Has brought me only pain, and grief, and tears,
Such as I suffered in the days long past,
And hoped I thrust behind me evermore.
And now again my life is passing sad ;
Weary my heart ; my dizzy brain perplexed ;

For life's deep, complex problems vex me sore,
And fill with deep unrest a soul once calm
With quiet won from struggle and from pain.
Many the lessons I have learned by heart ;
Many the problems I have solved with toil ;
Until from labor I had gained repose,
And fancied it were lasting. Vain the thought !
For now again, in Life's arithmetic,
I find a problem I had once worked out
To my full satisfaction. Puzzling then
It was ; long were the hours I, wearied, bent
Above the vexing sum ; but ah, at last
The answer was obtained—I satisfied.
And now once more the question intricate
I've found upon life's open page, and want
The pow'r to gain the answer. All in vain
I add, subtract, divide, and multiply,
Work out the sum by every process known
To reas'ning mind—wrong is the answer still,
And fails to satisfy mind, heart, or will.

So, wearied with the constant strife of thought,
The torturing question I could not resolve ;
The longings unfulfilled—unconquered, too ;

Associations keeping fresh, unhealed,
The wound my heart had suffered, here I came
In hope of solace for sick heart and brain.
Ah, vain, vain hope ! Not from myself can I,
E'en here, one hour escape. Not from the thoughts,
The pain, the strife, that make my life so sore,
Can I shut out my heart, e'en in the wilds
I love so well. And Memory, sometimes
A friend, sometimes one's bitt'rest enemy,
Hath hither followed ; keeping at my side
With most unwelcome zeal ; and to my heart
Repeating o'er and o'er tales of the past
Which I would fain forget ; and whispering
Those saddest of all words, "*It might have been !*"

So, restless still, and still unsatisfied,
Still sorrowful and sad, and sick at heart—
At times rebellious too, that I again
Must suffer pain once conquered to relief ;
And tired and listless for the want of hope,
Which, on her bier, within my heart lies dead,
I pass in idleness the long, sweet days—
Bitter to me they are, and full of pain—
And long for night, that I perchance may find

In sleep's oblivion rest for tortured mind,
And aching heart ; for Night to lay her hand
Upon the lips of garr'lous Memory,
And bid her hush her oft-repeated tales.
But even Night too often proves unkind ;
And sweet, coy sleep deserts my lowly bed ;
And Mem'ry, in the silence and the hush,
Speaks yet more loudly of the checkered past ;
Till from my burning eyes the tears fall fast,
And in the bitter anguish of the hour
I long in turn for morning, from the pow'r
Of my unwelcome friend to be set free,
And for a space, if brief, from her to flee

To-day I climbed yon lofty mountain peak,
And in the rapture of the glorious view
With which my eye was greeted, when I stood
Upon the highest point, and turned to gaze
Around, before, beneath me, I forgot
For one brief hour the pain that wrecks my life.
For strong within me is the artist still,
Though hushed to silence by the might of pain,
And death of hope, without which hearts grow sore.
Returning, wearied by the toilsome climb,

And steep and rough descent, Sleep graciously
My heavy eyelids touched with fingers soft,
And gave me one more hour of respite sweet
From strife of thought and sorrow's restless surge.
And sitting here to-night in evening's hush,
Some of her calm has stolen in my heart,
And stilled its throbbing pulse to even beat,
And life seems good, though sadder far than sweet.

But now the hush is broken by the roll
Of wheels, the tramp of iron hoofs upon
The toilsome road that winds through forest glooms
And open spaces—whence the vale below,
And proud, engirdling mountains, pale with mist,
Illumined with the mystic moonlight's sheen,
Is pictured sweetly to the gazer's eye—
But ever upward, upward, to the top
Of this steep mount, whose rugged, aged face
Wears on its brow our lowly dwelling-place.

It is not difficult to guess who comes
At this late hour along th' upwinding road.
We know the lumb'ring roll of those great wheels,
The steady tramp of those iron shodden feet,

And list to hear the notes of merry horn
Float hitherward upon the sweet night air,
With which, as in old days, the daily coach
Importantly still heralds its approach.

Waiting, I wonder idly what it brings.
New guests, whose lives may for a little space
Ruffle the surface of our idle days,
And then, departing, lightly be forgot?
Kind messages from dear ones, now afar?
Tidings of him, for loving whom too well
Self-exiled here I tarry? Nay, ah, nay!
For this I cannot hope—I dream indeed!
However sweet were words penned by his hand,
To me they must not come; howe'er my heart
May hunger for the kindly thought of his,
It still must be denied; between us two
A "wall of bitter-sweet" its lofty height
Doth rear, a barrier strong and stern as fate,
The which we may not, must not, *cannot* cross.
And so two lives are sore with sense of loss.

Upon the clear and fragrant evening air,
The horn's harsh notes are borne unto our ears,

Silvered by distance, caught up as in play
By saucy echoes, and repeated o'er
And o'er again, each time in softer tone,
Until they die at last, as dies the faint
Vibrations of the deep-toned, res'nant bell,
Which from its outlook in some tall church tower,
Tolls slowly, faithfully, each passing hour.
And now we hear the crack of long-lashed whip ;
The driver's jolly tones, as words of cheer
He utters to his half-exhausted steeds ;
And now, with sweep and flourish, learned by years
Of constant practice, 'round yon bend of road
The ancient stage-coach looms, and pompously
Sweeps up before the door.

All now is life !

Lights gleam from hall and parlor, chasing fast
The still, dusk shadows from the open porch
Wherein we sit ; and in the doorway near,
Good Mrs. Brown, with hands upon her hips,
Stands smilingly, and waits what is to come.
Sweet Sylvie Mayne, aroused from happy dreams,
Which, waking or asleep, come sweet to her,
Raises her head from off the shoulder broad
Where it of late has rested, and with yawns

Half forced, half stifled, wonders who has come
To join our party in these distant woods ;
And hopes, whoe'er they may be, they may prove
As nice as those already here ; then laughs
At the conceit her careless words display,
And crossing o'er to me, leans on my chair,
And, curious, awaits the answer there.

And soon the vehicle before the door
Yields up its living freight, and in our midst
Three strangers for a welcome waiting stand.
Foremost, a man of scarcely middle age,
Tall, dark, and proud, but with a pleasant face,
And easy air that speaks of culture broad.
Beside, and clinging wearily to him,
A blue-eyed woman, drooping with fatigue,
And in the rear, a fair-faced, slender girl.
I only note her eyes are dark as night,
And that her cheek is round with youth and health,
And then, with words of welcome on her lips,
Good Mrs. Brown has led the strangers in,
And we are left again, sole occupants
Of this broad porch, and all its dusky gloom,
Scarce reached, as yet, by you slow-creeping moon.

The lumb'ring coach, already on its way,
Throws back the sound of its departing wheels.
Each moment growing fainter to the ear ;
The frogs croak hoarsely from some distant pool,
In one unvarying note of dreary sound ;
O'erhead, the roses in the rising wind
Toss restlessly, and shake their fragrant robes.
Wet with the dews of night, till all the air
Is breathed anew with sweetness ; and the brook,
Scarce fifty feet away, still murmurs soft
The story of its journey through the meads,
Its daring leaps adown the mountain side,
Its run through spicy woods and by the mill—
And makes the night and silence seem more still.

Back to the past my thoughts are drifting fast,
When from yon lighted room a sweet, low laugh
Falls on my ear, and to my sense conveys
A pleasure vague ; so eloquent it is
Of care-free youth, and of a heart untouched
By sad experience of grief and pain ;
So plainly speaks a nature sweet and sound,
Healthful in tone, and merry in its mood.
And as, a second time, its cadence sweet

Blends with the outer sounds, I feel my heart
Grow strangely warm and tender to the girl
Whose fair; sweet face I scarcely yet have seen ;
To her who, in her merry innocence,
Contrasts so strongly with my weary self,
And brings again the days—oh, how long past !
When I was young, and gay, and glad like her ;
Ere life's experience had taught my heart
Life's deeper meanings ; and that happiness,
Although so coveted, so mourned its loss,
Is, as an educator of the soul
In what is highest, truest, noblest, best,
In what shall fit us for life's sternest tests,
Of far less pow'r than sorrow's dreaded fire,
Which, while it teaches, lifts the spirit higher.

And yet, one envies careless youth, which gives
To every day the color of the rose—
Its odor too—and knows not, or forgets,
That all the bloom which makes life's June so fair,
Hides many a thorn which autumn winds shall bare.
Yet who forbears to pluck the roses sweet
Because of hidden thorns which one may meet ?

Who will not say their fragrance compensates
For all the pain the piercing thorn creates ?

“Well, shall we like them?” Sylvie’s low-toned
voice

From where she careless stands my chair behind,
Brings back from thoughts like these my wand’ring
mind.

“How can I tell, my child ?” I, smiling, ask.
“Can one brief glance suffice to demonstrate
Whom we shall like, and whom perhaps shall hate ?”

“Ah, yes—sometimes—have you ne’er proved it true ?
Some at first sight send all my being through
A thrill of pleasure, and I then can tell
That I shall love them tenderly and well ;
Yet others—ugh ! their faces strike a chill
Straight to my heart; and so I turn away,
And—well, detest them, to my dying day.”

“Which yet is distant far, I trust, my child !
So how can you be sure dislikes you build
On such foundation shall so long endure ?

Are you so wise that you with certainty
Can say what shall be in the years to come?
You yield to impulse like the child you are.
Think, Sylvie! is it right, or just, or fair,
To judge with such unkindness one of whom
You nothing know, and who perchance you've seen
In an unhappy moment? to conclude,
With youth's most hasty judgment, that because
A face at first repels, it has no pow'r
You to attract seen in a happier hour?"

"Not just, not kind perhaps, and yet—ah, well,
I cannot help it. Some I dearly love,
And others have no pleasantness to me.
It may be wrong, but so I'm made, you see."

"Ah, child, that is indeed a poor, poor plea.
I'm made with temper that strikes sudden fire
As lightest touch of flint to tempered steel.
Shall I then make no effort to control
This weakness of my nature? will the plea
That I like this was made, avail for me
If I in yielding to it take a life?
I look within my heart, and there I find

Envy and pride, two monsters we should hate,
Have come to dwell, and now predominate
O'er all the virtues which therein abide ;
Shall I to these pay court, and these obey,
Because they fain within my heart would stay ?
Because by me unbidden they are there ?
And if to their dictation I shall yield,
And wrong and wound my friend, will he forgive,
Because, forsooth, the monsters are inborn ?
Our faults are given to us to overcome.
The greater be the fault, the richer, too,
The victory will prove when once attained ;
The sharper be the strife, the more complete
And sweeter will the conquest be when gained.
We all have those we love, and, as you say,
Those who to us no pleasantness can have.
Nor would I say, my dear, that this is wrong.
By sympathy, or contrast, some attract ;
And some repel by want of harmony
Between their souls and ours ; and thus it is
Their presence is to us like jarring notes
Upon an untuned instrument, to ears
Refined by culture ; some by force of strong
Magnetic power draw our hearts to theirs,

And we are glad and happy in their love ;
And others yet, by that mysterious sense
Of physical repulsion, most have felt,
And none, I think, has ever quite explained,
Seem so repugnant to us, that we find,
However much we may respect, esteem,
And honor them—however true, and good,
And worthy of affection they may be,
Our hearts can hold no fellowship with theirs.
But ere we shut out any from our love,
Or any all unknown, unheard, condemn
To bear our detestation, let us prove
That they are all unworthy, or their hearts
Have not been tuned to harmony with ours.
Believe me, Sylvie, not to you alone
I give this counsel, but myself as well ;
For I, like you, am all too quick to judge,
Too quick to blame, no less than to approve,
And readier to dislike; I fear, than love.
Not many can I take within my heart,
But once inside the portals, they are held
As something dearer than all else on earth ;
And though 'tis true that faces index oft
The mind and character ; that practiced ones

May read them as one reads an open book,
Still you, I think, dear girl, are yet too young
In *that* lore to be skilled ; and should not trust
Blindly to impulse in your choice of friends,
But study such as you would love, and base
Your confidence on sterling qualities
Of mind and heart—and prove that you are wise.
See what a long and tiresome homily
Your question has evoked ! But now, my dear,
Since you at sight have pow'r to demonstrate
Whom you shall like, and whom for life shall hate,
I leave your query open, and suggest
You answer it yourself—you must know best."

She laughed, and stooping, lightly kissed my cheek.
"Nay, since my hasty judgment you have shamed,
I will not say, but test them by their acts ;
And let them win my liking if they can
'By sterling qualities of mind and heart.'
Thanks for your counsel,"—and her voice dropped low.
"That I am ruled by impulse well I know,
And far too often have it to regret.
What you have said I shall not soon forget.
Thanks, and good-night ! Those folks are eating yet,

Let's hope they've good digestion. Papa there
Is fast asleep in that old crazy chair,
I do believe ! he'll take his death of cold
In this chill air. Now see how I can scold."

With this the merry maiden left my side,
And bending o'er her father, loved so well,
Slipped one white arm beneath his drooping head,
And wakened him with kisses. "Papa, dear,
'Tis growing late !" she said. "The air is damp ;
You must not slumber here, or I shall learn
Too soon the art of nursing, I'm afraid.
Upstairs I saw to-day a downy bed,
Stuffed full with feathers. Find it, sleepy-head !"

"Is that the way you scold ?" I smiling asked.
"I doubt not that your father will declare
'Tis rather pleasant to be scolded thus ;
To be awakened from so brief repose
By lips that have the freshness of the rose,
By arms that rival winter's purest snows,
And words more tender than they are unkind.
It 'minds me of yon brooklet's silver tones,
Fretting its way in music o'er the stones

Which do so little to obstruct its flow.
I find it pleasant, 'tis so soft and low."

"Oh, I can scold—you do not know as yet.
You'll see sometime how I can fume and fret."

"Indeed she will !" this from her father's lips,
Silenced by press of saucy finger tips.

"Now, papa, hush !" she said. "Or you, in turn,
My pow'rs in that direction soon may learn."

"I do not need to, child, I know them well,
As my submission to your whims may tell."

"Ah, papa, hush !" she pouted. "Don't you see
I wish to keep my credit good with her
For sweetness ? That I would not have her know
The brook that ripples softly o'er the stones,
And feigns to scold in voice so sweet and low
Out yonder, speaks in loud and angry tones
Where high-piled rocks obstruct its gentle flow ?
You're shiv'ring, papa ! Come ! 'tis time, indeed

You to my bidding paid a little heed.
I wish to get him safely off, you see,
Ere he reveal too much !" this last to me.

With playful force she dragged him from his seat,
And slipped her arm in his to lead him in,
And so make sure her mandate was obeyed.
"What would he do," the sweet witch laughing said,
As by my chair they paused to say good-night.
"What would he do without his daughter's care ?
He would have slept in that old straight-backed chair,
The careless man ! here in the chill and dew,
Had I not wakened him, the whole night through,
Nor once have guessed he was not safe at rest
On that huge heap of feathers overhead,
Which our good hostess designates a bed.
And then the consequence no doubt had been
To us the spoiling of these lovely days,
And lovelier nights ; so, papa, give me praise
That I have saved you from a horrid cold,
Though I to do it almost proved a scold."

He laughed, and stroked her head with tender pride,
Then either said good-night and went inside.

I followed soon ; the night had grown more chill ;
The dew lay heavy on the grass and flowers ;
The rising wind began to sigh and moan
Around the porch where now I sat alone,
A gloomy cadence in its softest tone,
Which struck within my heart an answer'ring chord,
And made my pulse beat painfully and hard.
So gath'ring up the book whose glowing words
Had held my thought till Twilight laid her hand
Upon the page, I sought my room, to find
Perchance a brief repose for heart and mind.
And Sleep, sweet Sleep, drew kindly near to me,
And as a mother soothes her babe to rest,
Hushed all my pain upon her gentle breast.



II.

“ A pure, transparent, pale and radiant face,
Like to a lighted alabaster vase.”



MORN in the mountains ! With her breath of balm,
And cool, sweet face washed clean in morning dew,
The Dawn comes smiling from the couch of Night,

And looks expectant on the sleeping world.
But all is dim and faint. The weary moon
An hour since laid her queenly head upon
The mountain's crest, and sank to her repose ;
And though the faithful stars their tiny lamps
Still hang all o'er the high-arched dome of heaven,
Their little light is all too faint to show
Aught save the outlines of the scene below.

But, cool and patient still, the Dawn awaits
The revelation which she knows shall be.
And broader, broader steadily becomes
The band of pearly white which girds the east ;
And faster, faster spreads the pale gray light
Which in her hand she brings, until its glow
Has reached the dusky shadows far below,
And piercing them, reveals, by slow degrees
Mounts, valleys, hills, towns, cities, rivers, seas,
Until the fair and patient Dawn beholds
A continent, engirdled by the arms
Of two broad oceans ; and, oh sight most sweet !
The Western World lies silent at her feet !

Morn in the mountains ! Now to action springs
The quiet Dawn, and to the breezes flings

Her violet banners edged with burnished gold,
In honor of the fast approaching sun ;—
That haughty king who loves the pageantry,
The glitter and the pomp of royal state ;
Who loves to deck himself in dazzling robes
Woven of many hues, and, angrily, hides
Sometimes a whole long day his brilliant face
Behind a thick gray veil, because, forsooth,
The servile Dawn has failed to welcome him
With that display he loves. The timid stars
Put out their flick'ring candles, and, abashed,
Shrink from the glory of his kingly face,
And, trembling, hide from view. Lavish of dye,
The artist Morn the whole horizon paints
In richest hues, blending the lovely tints
Of gold and scarlet, crimson, rose, and blue,
With rarest skill, till all the orient sky
Is one rich flush of color ; and ere long,
As silently as came the quiet Dawn,
The Sun's bright car rolls up the gold-paved way,
And bursts in brilliance on the dazzled day.

Morn in the mountains ! Swiftly change on change
Sweeps o'er the lower world, as higher still

The Sun's triumphal chariot proudly rolls.
Swift shafts of rosy light thrown on the crests
Of tallest mountains, dye the filmy robes
They still are wearing with the faintest tints
Of pink and crimson, till they lift their heads,
And, throwing off the half translucent veils,
Stand glorified, and crowned with amber light.
The brilliant hues of scarlet, ruby, pearl,
With which the east was lately all aflush,
Have been wiped out, and only gold remains,
Forming a dazzling halo 'round the brow
Of yon proud monarch of the op'ning day.
But see ! still lower down the mountain side,
Swift creeps the radiant sheen ; and higher lifts
Each moment now the blue, illumined mist,
Until at last each tree and hoary rock,
The whole night hidden, touched with shafts of light,
Stands out in bold relief—so clear and pure
The atmosphere of this sweet summer morn.
And now the valley, hitherto in shade,
Receives the greeting of the royal god,
And glows with added beauty ; and the play
Of light with flick'ring shadow has begun ;—
Shadows so changeful, delicate, and deep,

They give the pictured valley life and tone,
Which, wanting them, had been but tame, we own.

With day's rich light has come its music, too.
The birds, awakened by the spreading dawn,
Twitter, and chirp, and shake their feathered robes ;
Then from each tiny swelling throat bursts forth
A gush of sweetest melody, so glad,
And clear, and free, so true to highest art,
It thrills with ecstasy the hearer's heart.
The fowls less musically show their joy
At day's return, by pompous crow and cluck ;
The cows come lowing to the meadow bars,
And wait, impatient, for the milker's hand ;
A thousand insects wake to active life,
And soon begin their daily buzz and hum ;
And from the vale below, a cheerful shout
Of boyish glee ; or call of laborer
To plodding, patient ox ; or sharp report
Of eager sportsman's rifle, now and then,
As day advances, up the mountain floats,
Repeated by the echo's saucy notes.

I stood this morning on the rose-wreathed porch,
Where late last eve I sat, and gazed abroad

Upon the lovely picture, when the girl
Whose pleasant laughter then had stirred my heart
With interest, whose fair and sweet-lined face
I had this morning studied with delight,
Approaching from behind, half timidly
Paused at my side. I turned and looked at her,
And meeting her uplifted eyes, I smiled.
How much of happiness, I thought, must lie
In those unclouded depths ! how deep the well
Of tenderness and passion, hid within
The soul whose windows are so clear and bright !
In truth, her face is rarely sweet and fine ;
Full of all womanly, all modest grace ;
Of all rich possibilities, all pure
And tender impulses, and loving thoughts ;
Of sensibilities most delicate ;
And rare, innate refinements. Piquant, too,
And spirited, and bright with youth and joy.
In outline purest oval ; and in hue
A clear, dark paleness, lighted, as I said,
By deep, soft eyes, unclouded by a shade ;
Made sweeter by a pouting, tender mouth ;
And crowned by dusky lengths of silken hair,
Dressed in the graceful fashion of the day.

A slender form, but round and plump as well.
A voice well modulated in its tone,
And hands an empress might be proud to own.
Her name is Constance, and it suits her well.
She is not beautiful, but, better yet,
Is lovely. Does not dazzle one, but wins.
And so I took her straightway in my heart,
With an impulsiveness as great as that
I had reproved in Sylvie yester-eve,
And loved her well at once. And I believe
More than I give from her I shall receive.

So when this morning at my side she paused,
I asked, as in her upturned face I smiled :
“Is this your primal visit to these wilds ?”

“Oh, yes !” she said. “I have not been before
So deep among the mountains and the woods.
Is it not lovely here ? that wondrous view !
So fresh and sweet this morning air is, too !”

“Yes, it is lovely ; look where’er you will,
The world, as seen from here, is beautiful.
How soft and tender are those shades of green,

In which the trees are drest ! How rich and smooth
Those meadows, waiting for the mower's scythe,
Sparkling with diamond drops touched by the sun,
And cased in em'rald settings ! And how deep,
Yet delicate, the blue that roofs the world !
Yes, it is lovely, lovely ! all the scene !
At morn, at noon—and fairer still at night,
Seen by the pale moon's shimm'ring flow of light."

"Ah, is it not ! I thought, as we last eve
Toiled slowly up that almost endless road,
I never in my life saw aught so fair
As those brief glimpses of the vale below,
Lying so silent in that silver glow,
And all around it the embracing mounts.
And then the deep, dark woods, through which we rode!
But fragrant with the spicy scent of pines,
And partially illumined, too, at times,
Making the darkness visible. I own
I shivered sometimes with a nameless fear,
The sound of tossing branches seemed so drear,
And so intensely deep the forest's gloom.
But still I felt, for all, the lovely view,
Which now and then before us lay revealed,

Could compensate for all my weariness,
And for my foolish, causeless fears, no less."

"Your words recall the thought which filled my
mind,
Just ere you joined me," said I, as she paused.
"How modest Nature hides her fairest scenes
Far from the haunts of men ; and e'er reserves
Her sweetest nooks, her grandest, widest views,
And her most rare surprises, for the eyes
Of such as search among her hidden things,
And climb with toil her steepest, roughest paths,
And linger longest in her wildest haunts.
What lovely wild-wood flowers, and curious plants"—

I paused abruptly, as a deeper thought
Flashed in my mind ; and Sylvie, who had come
Without as I was speaking, and now sat
Upon the low broad step just at my feet,
Exclaimed with playfulness : "Ah, tell it us !
I see a lovely thought within your eyes,
And though it may be all too grand and wise
For our poor comprehensions, give it, pray !
Perhaps—who knows ?—'twill not be thrown away."

“My eyes tell tales, I am afraid,” I said,
“Or you are wondrous sharp. ’Tis true, indeed,
A deeper thought o’ertook the surface one,
Which I just then was trying to express,
And thrust it from its place. The thought was this :
That just as nature spreads her fairest scenes,
Not for the many, but the few ; and yields
To such as search along her wildest paths
Her richest treasures ; so God hides as well
His rarest and most precious gifts to man,
Far from the common sight ; and so He keeps
His grandest, widest outlooks ; His most sweet
And rare surprises ; and the deep and rich
Revealings of Himself, His purpose, will,
Not for the mass, but for the few grand souls
Who search among His deep and hidden things,
Who climb with toil His steepest, roughest paths,
And linger longest in His Holy Place.
To these he gives unsparingly His grace.”

I paused. The girls were silent, too, and seemed
My words to ponder. Constance gazed afar,
A dreamy look within her soft dark eyes,
Her fair, pale face grave with unusual thought.

And Sylvie, though her eyes were on my face,
Seemed meditating, too. At last she said :
“ The thought is good and grand. Thanks for its gift !
Perhaps, too, as I said, it may not be
Quite thrown away, though giv’n to us alone.
Now will you finish that, the surface one,
Which to express you only had begun ?”

“ I do not now recall—’twas this, I think :
That often, in the heart of deepest woods,
Scarce ever visited by foot of man,
One finds the loveliest flow’rs, the finest ferns,
Plants veined with delicacy exquisite,
And grouped by Nature with most perfect art ;
Rich, blooming vines, festooned from tree to tree,
With a wild grace no training could improve ;
Vistas so lovely one is stricken dumb,
And with a breathless pleasure gazes long ;
And then the mosses, spread with lavishness,
And in variety bewildering,
Beneath the feet, on rock and tree and shrub—
The softest mosses on the roughest rocks,
The finest lichens cov’ring tenderly
The moldering remains of some great tree,

Once tow'ring high in pomp and pride of life,
The sweet, rich sap in every tiny twig,
But, now, stripped of its verdure, stricken, dead,
Fast crumbling back to dust, from whence it sprung.
And this will serve to point what I to you
Last eve was saying, dear : That you, perchance,
By closer observation of a face
Which first may have repelled you, will have found
It has its finer phases ; and may learn
That in the soul of one you had disliked
The richest virtues dwell ; and so you think
No more of what repelled, but yield respect,
And honor, if not love—as you forget
The roughness of the rock, and but admire
Its garnishing of finest, softest moss
'Twill teach you, too, it is not always wise
To trust to impulse. Reason is a gift
Bestowed alone upon the race of man ;
And that should be our guide. That, and the true
And lofty type of Christian love, which we,
• Alas, so rarely in its fullness see—
That greatest of all graces, *Charity*."

The girls seemed thoughtful still. But Constance
said,

After brief pause : “ Ah, who hath Charity !”
And Sylvie, with a shrug : “ Not I, at least !
As was most plainly proven yester-eve,
By our good friend here.”—Smiling in my face
As thus she spoke.

“ Not many have the grace
In fullest measure, truly !” answered I.
“ Though many to possess it daily seek—
So frail is poor humanity, and weak.
Were all, or even they who bear the name
Of Christian, earnestly to shape their lives
By those few words which from the earnest lips
Of Paul the Matchless fell, far different
Our selfish world would speedily become.
For ‘ Charity doth suffer long—is kind ;
Doth envy not, and vaunteth not itself,
Nor is puffed up ; unseemly doth not act ;
Her own seeks not ; with ease is not provoked ;’
And, still more rare than all, ‘ *no evil thinks ;*
All things it beareth ; all things doth believe ;
All things it hopeth ; all things doth endure ;
This grace possessed doth *never fail* the heart,
But *to the end* abides.’ Apply this test
Not only to the widespread Christian world,

But to our own weak hearts as well, and we
Exclaim with Constance, ‘ Who hath charity ’ !”

“ Well, ladies, whither bears our course to-day ?”
Thus Mr. Mayne, who joined us where we stood,
And broke in on our contemplative mood
With hearty, cheery tones, which to one’s mind
Suggests the man’s true nature, deep and kind.

“ Ah, up the mountain to that lovely lake !”
His daughter answered, springing to her feet.
“ Miss Disbrow has not seen it, and no spot
In all these lovely wilds is half so sweet.
We’ll beg some goodies from kind Mrs. Brown,
And gather sweet wild berries as we go ;
And you shall bring us, from those crystal deeps
Where tangled lily-stems luxuriant grow,
Some speckled trout to make our feast complete ;
And cook them also, if you like. We’ll stay
In that delightful spot the whole long day,
If so it pleases you. What do you say ?”

The plan which Sylvie hastened to present
Seemed pleasant to us, and we gave assent.

“ Well, to the lake, then, if you’re all agreed !”
Said Mr. Mayne. “ Will half an hour suffice
To do your coaxing, pet, and prinking, too ?
By then the sunlight will have drank the dew,
And gathered fire enough our backs to broil,
As up the mountain paths we slowly toil.”

“ Ah, then we’ll have broiled venison and lamb
To grace our feast, without the trouble, too,
Of cooking ;” saucy Sylvie made reply.
“ You are a *dear*, you know, and lambs are we,
White, meek, and innocent, as lambs should be.”

She crossed her hands in meekness on her breast,
The roguish girl, and tried her very best
To look the character she thus had claimed ;
Succeeding but in looking what she is,
A mischievous and saucy child. A kiss
From tender lips fell on the rosy cheek,
And with his hearty laugh her father said :
“ I’ll take a piece from here ! I have no doubt
I’ll find it most delicious to the taste.
Now, run away, my lamb, and make all haste

To dress yourself for roasting in the sun.
I like, when lamb is served, it be well done."

He laughed again, and left us. And we too
Retired to don more suitable attire
For climbing hills and threading woodland paths,
Than our light morning garments. In good time
We gathered in the porch, and thence set out
Upon our toilsome but most pleasant walk,
Up hills, upon whose sunny southern slopes
The sweet wild strawb'ries turned their blushing cheeks
To meet the kisses of the morning sun ;
O'er meadow-turf, like velvet to the feet,
Through which the purling brooklet gayly runs ;
Through dusky woods, sweet-smelling, breezy, cool ;
Until at last we reached the silver pool,
Which was the object of our labored quest,
And on its banks, fatigued, sat down to rest.

Ah ! it was lovely as an artist's dream !
O'erhead tall, solemn pines their branches tost
In th' gentle breeze, and gave the air we breathed
A healthful, pungent odor ; filtered through
The tracery of plummy branches, fell

With softened glow, the morning sunlight's gold,
Resting on groups of graceful, feath'ry ferns,
And touching here and there some wild-wood flowers,
So delicate and modest, if in shade
We had, perhaps, unnoticed passed it by ;
Rocks great and small, and cushioned deep with moss,
Lay all around ; wild roses, pink with bloom,
And odorous sweet-briar, also flushed
With crimson blossoms, added to the scene
Touches of color exquisite ; beneath
Our feet, o'er spreading beds of mosses soft,
Crept the dark leaves of checkerberry vines,
Dropped thick with deep red balls, and intermixed
With spicy wintergreens, still young and sweet ;
Frost grapes, scarce out of bloom, climbed gracefully
The sturdy tree-trunks, from the branches high
Their juicy tendrils throwing to the breeze ;
And many another vine, and curious plant,
Whose names we did not know, and could not guess,
Was grouped and trailed around us everywhere ;
The lake, tree-girdled, bearing on its breast
Rich store of fragrant lilies, spread before,
And broke in golden ripples here and there,
As soft the sunlight on its bosom dropped ;

And far, far overhead the peerless blue,
Frescoed with foliage, looked the tree-tops through.

“Ah, this is nice !” said Sylvie, as she laid
Her head against her father’s arm, and fanned
Her warm cheeks with her hat. “Oh, papa, dear,
I’m roasted to a turn ! you need not fear
Your lamb is underdone. Still, I persist,
I’m *rare* as well ; now, papa, am I not ?
Has aught more rare than I fall’n to your lot ?”

She looked up in his face, her loving eyes
As blue as were th’ exquisite summer skies.
What wonder that his face was full of pride,
And that he drew her closer to his side,
As, bending to her cheek, he answered low ;
“The rarest lambkin God e’er made, I know !”

“How passing lovely !” Constance murmured soft,
As by my side she sat, and gazed around
Upon the scene she had not viewed ere this.
“These trees ! these ferns and mosses ! and the lake—
How clear, and still, and smooth ! Oh, for a boat,
To gather those sweet lilies where they float !

How all reminds me of your words this morn,
That Nature hides her very loveliest things
Deep in the heart of woods, which, would one view,
One should not fear the toilsome climb thereto."

"Yes! e'en those lilies, simple as they are—
And beautiful as well—are quite beyond
The reach of careless fingers. Would one grasp
Their od'rous beauty, one must wade far out,
Regardless of the flags, and tall, rough sedge,
And ferns, and rushes harsh, that fringe the edge."

"Regardless, too, of monstrous, green-backed frogs ;
And turtles snapping at your dainty toes ;
And snakes and lizards lurking in the flags ;
And spiral lily-stems, which, coiling close
Each 'round the other, trip your wary feet,
Till—splash! you drop into the lake's moist arms,
And lay your cheek beside the lilies pale.
Thanks! but I think not e'en those flow'ry charms,
Bewitching as they are, could e'er avail
To tempt *me* the experiment to try."
Thus Sylvia, with laughing lip and eye.

“Alas for poetry when *she* is by !”
I said to Constance. “She will not forget
Life’s realism, nor will overlook—
The naughty girl !—whate’er of ludicrous
The loftiest sentiment may underlie.
She turns to ridicule whate’er we say.
We will not waste our pretty thoughts on her,
Nor in her presence sentimentalize,
Who laughs at all our fancies, grave or wise.”

The hours sped by and brought the warm-breathed
noon.

And I and Constance, who had wandered off,
Each her own way, within the wood’s deep heart,
Were thence recalled by voice of song, which, clear
As note of silver pipe, rang through the trees,
And floated faintly, sweetly, to our ear :
“Come, come, oh, come ! the dinner waits for thee !
Come, come, oh, come ! haste hitherward and see
The dainty banquet here prepared for thee.
Or thou shalt hear, sad as the voice of fate,
Too late ! too late ! for dining thou’rt too late !
Too late ! too late ! haste ere thou art too late !”

“Too late ! too late !” the echoes faint repeat.
Thus breaks the song, with accent clear and sweet,
Soft on the silver tide of revery,
O’er which I’ve drifted to the Past’s wide sea,
And backward to the Present floats my thought.
I sigh—and smile, as, by the vibrant air
Caught and retained, the song to me is brought,
And dropped upon my sense ; then hasten where
Is spread the meal our coming doth await,
Lest I be greeted with the dread “ too late !”

A “dainty” and unique repast, forsooth,
Is spread beside the clear and limpid lake.
And dainty fingers, with their touches soft,
A poem of it have essayed to make.
Around a pyramid of biscuit light,
Whose parted lips reveal the pink-veined tongue
Their flaky mouths shut in, are trailed the leaves
And scarlet balls of checkerberry vines ;
And plates of crisp brown cakes a brilliant spray
Of crimson-bloomed sweet-briar graceful twines ;
Wild strawb’ries blush within a wreath of fern ;
And in a lovely garland, deftly wove
Of wild pink roses, and of daisies white,

Lie spotted trout, browned richly to a turn,
And with the spicy wintergreen bedight ;
Beside each plate, a lily, pale and sweet,
Breathes fragrant greeting as we take our seat
Upon the mossy divan, circling round
Our low-spread table on the level ground.

Sweet Sylvia, with roses in her hair,
In belt, on breast, and blushing in her cheeks ;
Whose hands have spread and garnished our repast ;
Whose merry song has called us to the feast,
Plays hostess to us three, her honored guests.
And we discuss the viands she has spread ;
And chat, and toy with blossoms she has culled ;
And watch the smiles and dimples come and go
On her fair cheek ; and list the ripples low
Of laughter from her lips ; the sparkling flow
Of saucy repartee which quick replies
To all we say, or merry, grave, or wise ;
And let the hour glide by, fast as it will.
So talk, so listen, feeding every sense.
Till—hark ! a sharp report—and sharper shriek
From Sylvia and Constance—breaks the hush
Which broods in these deep woods, and startles each

To paleness with its suddenness of sound.
And then we hear a rustling, and a rush
Through leafy branches ; and with light, swift bound,
A slender, graceful hound springs into sight,
And seeing us, barks with a quick delight.

Each at the other gaze we with surprise ;
And as I meet the glance of Constance' eyes,
Which turn from me upon the panting hound,
I note a sudden flash of consciousness
Light in their soft, dark depths ; a sudden flush
Flame faintly into rose upon her cheek.
And then with curious half-smile, she says :
“Gyp—Gyp—why Gyp !” and, with a joyful bound
Of recognition, close beside her springs
The dog, upon her shoulder lifts its paws,
And mute, but glad, caresses her soft cheek.
The rose-tint deepens faintly, as the girl
With low, but conscious laugh bends o’er the hound,
And strokes its sleek head with her fingers white,
The dog responding with a dog’s delight.

It is not difficult for one to guess
That in the past lie buried sunny days

Which these have shared—which each remembers yet.
And, wondering, I say : “It seems you two
Have met before—are olden friends, indeed,
If to this recognition one gives heed.”

“Yes, we have met before ! eh, Gyp ? good Gyp !”
She answers, with another low soft laugh ;
But of its master asks the dog no word ;
Though one may guess that he is in her thought,
As with a deeper consciousness is stirred
Her lovely face, when once again is caught
The sound of springing branches, and we hear
A brisk and manly footstep drawing near.

The dog bounds back to whence proceed the sounds ;
Is lost to view a moment—then appears,
Her master introducing as he comes,
With short, sharp barks of pleasure. Curious
To see the man whose near proximity,
Thus unexpectedly made known, could call
To Constance’ cheek a flush so deep and warm
As that now mantling it, I turn and watch
For his appearance in the leafy arch,
Formed by the low and interlacing boughs

Of two great trees, through which a moment since
The dog has broken ; and in briefest space
A tall and manly figure stands therein,
And pauses with surprise, as on his view
Breaks the unusual, and yet picturesque
And lovely scene before him.

Brief the pause,

But in it I have noted well the tall
And well-built form in hunting dress of brown ;
The noble, kindly face with deep blue eyes,
Broad brow and flowing beard, which hides in part
The deep-cut lines around his firm, proud mouth—
A mouth that wears just now a smile amused ;
An eye that lights with sudden glad surprise,
As on Miss Constance' blushing face it rests.
And then with eagerness he forward steps,
And with extended hand to her, exclaims :
“Miss Disbrow ! this indeed a pleasure rare
And unexpected is—to meet you here,
In these lone woods, of which I thought myself
Sole monarch at this time. Pray did you drop
From those soft clouds above ? or have you wings
To waft you hither from your distant home,

Where scarce a week ago I stood with you,
And in the evening gloaming said adieu?"

And Constance, rising, placed her hand in his,
And answered, laughing : " Naught so marvelous
As cloud or wings has brought me up this mount ;
Though I had welcomed either, as I climbed
The steep, rough paths, and felt the burning sun
Of Summer hot upon me. I might ask
Of you the self-same question, but forbear.
My good friend Gypsy took me by surprise
A moment since, and, by her presence here,
Suggested that her master might be near."

And then she turned and introduced her friend—
Dane Denham, so she named him, I believe—
And added, with the rose still on her cheek :
" Had you appeared a brief space earlier,
We could have offered to you something more
Inviting than the remnants of our feast.
Such as we have, we freely give, at least."

" What more could any ask ?" he said, with smiles,
Which lighted pleasantly his fine, good face.
" And I had found that tempting, at this hour,

Decked as it is with many a lovely flower,
Save for the fact that appetite's demands
Already are appeased. So, if you please,
I'll but accept one of those lilies fair,
As, of your late repast, my modest share."

She gave the flower, simply, with a smile ;
And he, its sweetness breathing, said to her—
His kind hand stroking Gyp's sleek head the while—
"So she apprised you of my near approach,
And your surprise forestalled, in some degree !
But fancy mine, when from the solitude
And silence of these woody heights, I come
Upon a picture such as greets me here,
And find a friend I thought was distant, near !"

She smiled, and Sylvie said, half timidly :
"I hope you find the picture pleasant, sir ?
We think it beautiful."

He turned on her
One swift bright glance, another on the scene
That spread its beauty 'round him, and replied :
"Aye ! far more pleasant than I've words to say !
These woods are full of lovely nooks, and views,

And grand surprises, but I've seen as yet
No spot so fair as this."

"That tiny lake,
Set in among these tall, engirdling trees,
And fringed with wealth of ferns and water-flags,
No little does to make it beautiful!"
Suggested Constance.

And he quick replied :
"Nor is your grouping on this mossy green,
Around the snowy cloth with flowers decked,
The least fair feature of the witching scene.
I think you cannot fancy how you add
Unto its picturesqueness ;—what it was
To step from out the silent, lonely wood
On this high mount, where I had thought myself
Alone, except for Gyp's companionship,
Upon a scene so beautiful as this,
Which lacks not e'en the human element,
To make it seem perfection."

"Do not move,"
Cried Sylvie, running to the leafy arch,
Wherein the stranger had at first appeared,
"Till I have seen how picturesque you look,
Framed by the trees within this lovely nook."

And Mr. Denham, smiling, low remarked,
As with admiring eyes he watched the girl :
“ She does not seem to know she takes away,
With her departure from the pictured group,
One of its fairest figures.”

“ Come and look ! ”

She called to me ; and as I joined her there :
“ We did not know we made a picture fair
As that, Miss Wheaton, did we ! See how sweet
Miss Constance looks with that bewitching flush
Upon her cheek, that soft light in her eyes !
And he, the stranger, too, how nobly proud !
You should have been an artist, sir,” she said,
As laughing she returned, “ and sketched us here,
Ere we had been aware that you were near.”

“ I would I were ! Something like that, indeed,
Flashed through my thought as in yon springing arch
I paused a moment, ere I joined you here.
I often wish the artist’s skill were mine,
When in my wanderings I come upon
Some scene of beauty like to this—or one
I saw this morn—of which I’ll tell you naught,
But on some day like this, as fair and bright,

Will lead you thither, if it pleases you
My convoy to accept. This much, I think
I may, howe'er, premise : that never yet
Have you a scene which in similitude
Approaches that, beheld. Not wild, or rude,
Or picturesque, so much as strange and weird.
At all events, so it to me appeared."

"You make us curious!" I said with smiles.
"Pray is it near or far--this strange weird place?
And whither lies the path which we must trace
To bring us thither?"

"On, across the mount,
And down the farther slope," he answered me,
"If you would reach the spot from here;—a rough
And rugged way, unpleasant to the feet
Of those unused to treading mountain paths.
But from below a gentle ascent leads
Straight thitherward; I therefore would advise
Another day be chos'n, in which to view
The curious scene I have described to you."

"Described?" Miss Constance archly asked. "I
thought
You quite refused of it to tell us aught."

“Pardon ! the scene to which I had referred,
I should have said—I but mischosed the word.”

He smiling answered.

“I’ll forgive !” thus she.

And I : “To-morrow, then ? will that suit all ?

If Mr. Denham for us then will call,

And be our guide to that enchanting spot,

Unlike all others. Is it wood or grot,

Or mountain view, or sylvan, dusky dell,

Or forest grim——”

“Nay, nay, I shall not tell !”

He laughing, interposed. “’Twould spoil the scene

Which you are sure to feel creep o’er you, when

You stand and gaze upon the scene of gloom

To which I introduce you. I shall then

To-morrow come, and thither be your guide ?

Your curious eye shall thus be gratified,

And *you* will long to have the artist’s skill

The strange, drear picture to transfer at will

To board or canvas.”

“Yes ? then shall I bring

My book and pencils, and essay the scene ?”

I smiling, asked :

He turned a curious glance

Upon my face, and scanned it well, then smiled
And answered : “ Yes ! you’ll find it well worth while,
I promise you.”

“ Oh, papa, see that bird !

That lovely, lovely bird !” cried Sylvia ;
And she, sweet child, herself not all unlike
The bright-winged songster she so much admired,
Sprang toward where the golden oriole
Swung on its breezy perch above the lake ;
And as it spread its wing swift flight to take
To more secluded nooks, she followed fast,
And soon was lost to view. Then Mr. Mayne,
Half fearful lest too far her feet should roam,
Strolled off to join his darling one ; and I
Took up my book, and for a little space
Withdrawing from the others, spread my shawl
Upon the mossy bank, and gave myself
To reading, and to thought.

Thus left alone

Were Constance and her friend, although in sight
Of where I sat. But as, from time to time,
I glanced up from my book, and saw the bright
And lovely face, still wearing on its cheek
The soft pink flush his coming there had called ;

And marked the deference of air and tone
With which he talked to her ; I freely own
The romance thus unfolding to my eyes,
I found more pleasant than the rhythmic lines
Which filled the open volume in my hand.
And so, awhile, I pleased myself with what
I pictured to my thought might be to these
The outcome of this chance encounter here
High on this mountain steep. *Chance*, did I say ?
Nay, *never* chance ! Our God who rules the world,
And guides its mightiest forces silently,
Directs *our* steps, although we know it not ;
And from remotest climes, leads, each to each,
Those who were formed to round each other's lives,
Though all the world oppose. And so not chance,
But God's sure hand of wise and perfect love,
Had led these hitherward.

I noted well

The light of admiration in his eyes,
As her sweet face they sought ; I saw how strong
Her int'rest was in him ; I knew how deep,
Aye, and how fathomless the well of love,
Which in her young and tender heart would spring,
When by the magic wand it should be touched ;

I knew how passionate, and how intense
The joy which would be hers in that glad hour ;—
Aye! did I not? had I not tasted it?—
Just tasted, ere the jeweled goblet lay
In fragments at my feet. Had I not felt
The sacred triumph, and o'erwhelming bliss
Of love thus given and received? Ah, yes!
Not one sweet note in all love's magic scale,
But I had learned to sound! But ah, I, too,
Had learned as well each solemn minor tone,
Which filled my heart with pain that few have known,
And, ringing there, woke many a bitter moan.

Would it be thus with her? Were *never* love
In deepest fullness known to human hearts,
Without its minor strains? And yet, what song
Or symphony so sweet as that through which
That sad, low, thrilling undertone doth run!
How should we often tire of Day's glad sun,
Were there no shade to give the brightness tone!
Love would be tame indeed were it all joy.
Day would be wearisome were there no clouds
To cast cool flick'ring shadows on the earth,

And make the sunlight seem more soft and bright.
The life that knows but joy, and peace, and love,
Has never half its meaning known or proved.
I would not have my day all sun, no shade ;
I would not have my song of love without
Its tender minor notes ; but when alone
Of these it is composed, the song becomes
A dirge of mournfulness and deepest woe ;
A day in which the clouds bend dark and low
Through *all* its hours, is sad and drear indeed.
But God is good, and gives to none all shade.
Through darkest clouds how oft a sunbeam's
 made
A golden rift, and promised fairer hours !
And saddest symphony not seldom swells
To proudest notes of triumph, ere we turn
The last page, and the final score discern.

Thus hopeful for yon happy, loving girl ;
And comforting myself, who truly stands
In sorest need of such consoling cheer ;
I idly sit upon the moss-grown bank,
My open book unread upon my knee,
And give to thought the fullest liberty.

I will not say how oft a sudden pang
Of memory—a longing deep and sore
For *his* companionship, who keeps my heart
In firmest and in tend'rest hold, strikes sharp
Upon its quiv'ring chords, as there I sit,
And watch the two, who, for the moment, find
Each in the other all that each desires.
How e'en the memory of golden rifts
Which sometimes change the face of darkest
clouds—
The dirges, swelling oft to triumph proud,
Writ as they are by God, in every part—
Small comfort gives my sore and aching heart.

But I am glad when Sylvia's return
From childish chase of brilliant, swift-winged
bird,
Becomes the signal for our homeward walk.
And as we slowly pace the hillside paths,
I hear in silence all the lively talk
Of merry Sylvie, happy as a child ;
Of Constance, quieter but no less glad ;
Of Mr. Mayne, whose careless, cheery tones
Have grown familiar ; and the deep, low voice

Of Mr. Denham joining in the chat ;
And though I listen, sometimes with a smile,
My heart throbs sadly, painfully the while.

In bitterness I ask myself : Oh, what
Have I with these in common ? They are glad,
And young, and free from care ; life spreads before
A bright and flow'ry way ; they tread with joy
Its op'ning sweep, and dream 'tis all like this ;
But I have deeply drank the bitter waves
Which spring at intervals along its walks,
The taste still ling'ring on my fevered lips ;
My feet e'en yet are bleeding with the thorns
I pressed in treading paths that looked as fair
As these on which they're entering but now ;
I've left behind me youth, and hope, and joy ;
And though love still remains, as deep and strong
As even they will know, its bonds annoy,
And chafe, and fret, till I would fain be free
From thralldom which has brought but pain to me.

So what have I in common with glad youth ;
And these, who nothing know of grief like mine,
Or what it is to live, and still resign

All that makes up life's happiness and worth.
Their fullness makes my dearth seem still more great ;
Their joyousness more deep and strong my pain ;
So I am glad from these and all to' escape,
And shut myself within my silent room,
Alone with Sorrow, and my heart's deep gloom.

PART SECOND.

WINE.

PART SECOND.

WINE.

I.

“ But when at last upon their way returning,
Through the broad meadow in the sunshine burning,
They reached the gate, one sweet spell hindered both.”

A MORN of summer splendor ! crystalline
With myriad dew-drops, sparkling 'mid the green
In brilliant scintillations ! opalline
With blue transparent mists, which, shot athwart
From time to time with iridescent gleams,
Show all the opal's changes ! berylline
With glitt'ring leaves, transparent in the sun,
By skillful lapidary chased and cut !
And amethystine, too, with purple clouds,
Which turn their opaque edges to the light,

And their reverse of silver thus reveal !
Golden as well, with crowns of sunny sheen
Set on each mountain brow, and flashing soft
Their radiance on the meadow's verdant cheek ;
With sun-tipped arrows, piercing to the heart
Of forest monarch, and the bosom bright
Of mountain torrent laughing at their flight,
And catching them with playful, foamy hands,
To toss them back, charged with the iris' hues,
From deepest reds, to palest, loveliest blues !

A straight-cut road, which upward, upward slopes ;
And many a lovely vista to us opes ;
And many a wide extended view reveals,
As carelessly along its grass-grown ruts
We stroll, and chat, or silence keep at will !
But for the song of birds, which with a thrill
Of sound delicious, now and then bursts forth,
And insects hum, the perfect morn is still.
On either side are low o'ershadowing trees,
Wreathed thick with summer garniture of leaves,
Displaying all the wide variety
Of grouping, veining, tinting, finish, cut,
Which lavish Nature, with unstinted hand,

Gives to the warm-breathed summer. And the ferns,
As varied and as fine, which group themselves
By every rock in this productive soil,
Their fringed fronds are waving everywhere.
Beside the path, one of the many brooks
Of this well watered land, runs silently,
And fed by mountain springs, lies clear and cool
Upon its snowy pebbles ; sleeps in pools
Wherein the tiniest fishes swim and sport ;
And flows in dreamy leisure down the slope,
Till it has reached yon ragged, bristling gorge,
And, startled, wakes to take the rapid plunge
Which swift precipitates it, white with foam,
Down to the sunny, grass-grown meads below,
Through which, content, it runs with gurgling flow.

Our party is increased by two to-day ;
They who with Constance Disbrow hither came,
Her brother, and his gentle, blue-eyed wife.
She is not strong, the lady, nor is used
To climbing hills like these ; and so she claims
Her husband's arm to aid her up the slope,
And often lingers 'neath some spreading tree,
Whose shade invites her to a brief repose.

Somewhat ahead, Miss Constance and her friend,
Who carries neath his arm my sketching-book—
Which I, by him reminded, thus have brought—
And talks to his companion, in a tone
So low his words are lost to all but her ;
While she, the tell-tale pink upon her cheek,
Almost in silence listens ; now and then
Her sweet eyes raising to his low-bent face,
With shy, half-conscious, but exquisite grace.
To these, at least, naught wanting is to make
The day perfection ; and I smile, and joy
In her just dawning happiness—and sigh
At thought of days as fair as this begun,
Which turned to darkness ere the noon was reached.
Beside me, Mr. Mayne ! and here and there,
Among the trees on either side the way,
Or bending o'er the murmuring brook, to watch
The tiny fishes sporting in its pools,
And dipping lily fingers in the tide
In vain attempt to grasp them ; gath'ring flowers,
And delicatest ferns, until her hands
Are running o'er with color ; pausing now
By us, and now, half timidly, indeed,
By Constance and her friend, with girlish chat

And sweet refrain of laughter ; followed close
By Gyp, where'er she wanders, flits the light
And graceful form of Sylvie, glad and gay
As are the birds who swing and sing all day.

So on we stroll along the pleasant path ;
And nothing weird has met our eyes as yet,
Seen by the light of morning's brilliant sun ;
And nothing stranger than the miracle
Of summer once again returned to earth
After long exile to the gracious South—
After long sleep among the wintry snows—
Than wealth of verdure and of blossom bright
Where few months since was dearth of leaf and bloom;
And then we pass some rustic bars—" Just like
A drove of sweet-breathed kine, turned out at morn
To graze in pleasant pastures, while the dew
Lies sweet and cool upon the meadow grass"—
Says merry Sylvie as we each file through.
And still the grassy pathway spreads before,
Smooth, soft as velvet carpet to the feet.
So Mr. Mayne : " Why, one would think that this
Had been a traveled road ; so straight it is,
So uniform in breadth, so deep the ruts,

All grass-grown though they be. See how it cuts
Its way right through the trees on either side !
A simple path would be less true and wide."

And Mr. Denham answers : " You are right !
I'm told it led straight up these swelling hills,
From o'er the river, whose translucent tide
Flows through the vale five hundred feet below,
Until it reached the pretty county town,
Set like a jewel mid its em'rald hills.
They called it then ' The Turnpike ' ; now the same,
Except that ' *Old* ' is added to its name."

" And why The Turnpike ? " Sylvie laughing asks.
" Because it is so straight and never turns ?—
Ne'er turns aside to run through breezy woods
With shadows dusk ? to find some sylvan nook
Where fairies dwell ? to linger near some brook
That has on summer days a sweet, cool look ? "

" Yet takes them gratefully when in its way
They come—as here, for instance—would you say ? "
Says Mr. Denham, joining in her mood.
" No doubt you know," he adds, " that in old days

Across all well-made roads was interposed
At intervals, a barrier, named a gate ;
To pass which, or by day or night, though late
The hour, though urged by weariness or haste,
The traveler was forced to patient bide
The coming of the keeper, whose demand
Of 'toll' must be regarded, or the gate
Shut down upon his path like bars of fate.
And roadways thus patrolled were 'Turnpikes' named ;
And this was one."

" Ah, now I comprehend !

In those 'old days' my spirit had not come
To dwell on earth, but wandered 'mid the stars,
Or sought some planet distant far from this,
Where 'Turnpikes' are not known ; where all the paths
Are paved with golden splinters from the sun,
And open to the viewless sprites of air.
So 'tis not wonderful I could not guess
Why traveled way, so straightly cut as this,
Should thus be named.—Oh, papa, look ! how queer,
And how uncanny ! and how lone, and drear,
And silent ! Mr. Denham ! it is here—
This is the place you wished us to behold—
Is it not so ?" And Sylvie, sensitive

As frailest wind-flow'r of the earliest spring
In blasts of April, shivers as with cold,
The curious scene before her to behold.

The child has stopped spell-bound, half-breathless
too,
With her first exclamation of surprise ;
And we have paused as well—our guide, with smiles
At Sylvie's artlessness and wonder ; we,
With a surprise as deep as he could wish.
For there before, out of the summer's heart,
Out of the flush and verdancy of June,
Was spread a wintry wood, devoid of leaf,
Or bud, or blossom ; through its length and breadth
No spot of greenness or of bloom was shown ;
No gush of bird-song sounded from the place ;
A cold, gray twilight filled it, for no ray
Of sunlight's glory fell or flashed therein ;
But, at the farther side, a bright gold light
Showed that the sun was shining just beyond—
A brilliant background to the eerie scene.
Thus all was bare, as though a deadly blight
Had fallen on the place ; and silent, too,
As if 'twere frozen by the wrath of God.

On one hand this ! And on the other side,
The grass-paved road ; the trees, in their rich dress
Of soft, deep green ; the wealth of waving ferns ;
The briar roses with their crimson cheeks ;
The creeping vines ; the mosses, velvet soft ;
The laughing brook ; and merry, singing birds.
On one hand all the summer's blush and bloom !
And on the other, winter's deepest gloom !

We gaze awhile in silence at the view
Thus opened suddenly before our eyes,
Too filled with wonderment, and with surprise,
Too conscious, each, of that drear influence
Which scenes so weird exert o'er minds refined,
To put in words our feelings or our thoughts.
Then Mr. Mayne the silence breaks, and says :
“ Well, this indeed is curious ! a scene
Unlike all I have hitherto beheld
In this most picturesque, romantic land.
The seasons here seem truly to have met,
And clasped their hands. Not ‘Summer lingering
In lap of Spring,’ as we so often read,
But Winter, hoary, gray, severe of mien,
Held in the fresh warm arms of Summer's queen.”

And Sylvie : " Ugh ! 'tis horrible ! and filled
At night, I know, with goblins, and the pale
Weird ghosts of summers past and gone, wherein
These dead old trees have tossed their tender arms
In breezes sweet with violets, and warm
With southern fires ; have sighed and whispered soft
Responses to the wooing winds ; and drank
With joy, the nectar of the evening dews.
Just think how wild and drear it must appear,
Seen by the ghastly moonlight, pale and blue !
Ugh ! I'd not enter there, by day or night,
For all the fabled store of glitt'ring gold
Hung from the rainbow's prism'd arch ! would you,
Miss Constance ? say !"

And Constance, with a shrug :

"I would not care to, certainly ! it seems
To me uncanny in extreme ; so still,
And gray, and desolate, in contrast viewed
To all the light and color of the fields,
And hills, and verdant woods, o'er which and through,
Our way has led this morn."

Ad-interim,

The others have approached, and their surprise
And wonder duly shown. And then to me

Our guide turns with a smile, and curious says :
“ Now, if you please, Miss Wheaton, we will have
Your verdict on the scene ! what its impress
On your more cultivated mind has been.
The girls, with youth’s susceptibility
To Nature’s influence, and by it swayed,
With eloquence to us have just portrayed
The deep impression made on them by this
Most curious of her works. Now let us hear
How such a prospect has the pow’r to move
A mind that’s more mature.”

“ Nay, I’ve not left
My youth so far behind me, but I yet
Am sensitive as they to Nature’s moods,”
I, smiling, answer him. “ Nor is my mind
So strong, or so mature, but I too feel
The influ’nce weird, the strange, uncanny spell
Exerted by this most unusual scene.
To come upon it here, engirdled close
In summer’s warmth and wealth, seems not unlike
What it would be to tread Judea’s hills,
Bathed in the radiance of an Eastern sun,
And come upon a valley, wide and deep,
Wherein a silent army lies, complete

In outward form, in sinew, bone, and flesh,
But void of breath, and waiting for the voice
Of prophecy to speak the magic words
Unto the winds of heaven, that bid them breathe
Upon those myriad forms inanimate,
That they may live again. Oft, to my mind,
I've pictured thus those rigid, prostrate shapes
Which filled the Prophet's wondrous vision, but
So forcible an illustration ne'er
Have I beheld, as this. They seem to me—
These bare, gray trees—like to a company
Of yet unburied dead, awaiting here,
In silence, and in deep, unbroken gloom,
A formal sepulture in fitting tomb."

Though Sylvie shivered at the picture grim
My words had conjured up ; and though in them
There truly nothing seemed of ludicrous,
Yet Mr. Denham laughed, as in response.
Then, seeing our surprise, he gayly said :
"I find the mind I deemed the most mature—
Endowed with largest store of strength and sense,
Has drank more deeply of the potent spell
This scene exerts, than these less cultured ones.

I fancied yours too nicely poised, to feel
The thrill of nameless dread I knew would steal
Along these youthful pulses ; that from you
A full *appreciation*, it is true,
This curious picture would receive, but yet,
I fancied it would seem to you no more
Than what it is—a bleak and dreary wood,
Contrasting sharply with the scene around.
And lo, from you the most poetic flight
Of fancy doth proceed—from you the most
Romantic simile—a still, dead host !”

“Yes, and why not ?” I query. “Is it true
The mind by culture or maturity
Aught of its power *loses* ? does it not
The rather *gain* in all fine impulses—
In sensitiveness unto all that wakes
The finer sensibilities and thoughts ?
Does not the cultivated mind respond
Most quickly to the throbs of Nature’s heart,
And feel most sensibly her changing moods ?
The rude and unrefined would little see
In this strange scene, beyond the simple fact
Which it presents—a half dead wood, devoid

Of sunlight or of color, set within
A brilliant summer landscape. This, indeed,
I see as well ; but yet it is to me
A something more than this : another proof
Of Nature's wide variety, displayed
For our instruction, admiration, gain ;
A grand, poetic thought from God's own heart.
It has for me, beside, a simile
Of deeper meaning still than I've expressed,
Which touches on the wide experience
My heart and life has known. This I forbore
To give to you, for reasons varied ; but
I do not feel you paid, in what you said,
A tribute just or flatt'ring to the mind
Mature, or cultivated, or refined."

"I stand corrected, and your pardon crave !"
To this he answered. "I'd not giv'n, in truth,
The subject e'en a moment's passing thought,
Or had the same conclusion doubtless reached.
It *must* be true, indeed, that culture gives
The powers of the mind a wider scope,
A deeper sensibility and strength.
And had I studied thoughtfully your face,

I must have seen the fine, poetic lines
Predominant o'er those of prosy sense ;
And have expected to receive from you
The highest flight of imagery and thought,
Descriptive of the pow'r with which is fraught
A scene of contrasts so pronounced and wide,
Which could be given us. And my surprise
Had not provoked reproof so stern, yet wise."

" Oh, I'll forgive you, since 'tis true that your
Discernment only was in fault. And now,
If you'll resign the burden you have borne
So kindly hitherto, I'll, with what skill
I may possess, the outlines of this scene
Transfer to paper, that I may at will
Fill in with light and color—which it needs
To give its contrasts force."

He gave the book ;
My pencils pointed ; sought for me a nook
Where I could sketch at ease ; wished me success ;
With playful envy coveted my gift ;
Then, at my bidding, left me to my work,
And with the rest strolled onward for a space ;
And I was left alone in this strange place.

I sketched some moments rapidly, then leaned
My cheek upon my hand, and gazed, and dreamed.
How like my life—and theirs, all gay and bright—
This picture of strange contrasts is! I thought.
I, in the midst of life's warm summer still,
But stricken to the heart with wintry gloom—
Its life and hope, and youthfulness, and joy,
Dead as those silent branches, and, like them,
Its verdure and its bloom all turned to gray!
And they, my gay companions, in whose cups
The wine of life, and youth, and happiness
Foams sparkling to the brim—their hearts are glad,
And bright, and flushed with color, as these hills,
Which, like a beryl circlet, clasp the scene,
And make the dearth and dimness deeper seem!

Thus musing as I gaze, I note again,
The warm, gold sheen of light that shows beyond
The shadowed wood, and catch therefrom a gleam
Of brightness for my saddened heart; a faint,
Sweet thrill of hope, that when my falt'ring feet
Have traversed all the dreary length before—
E'en though the pathway ends but in a grave—
I shall the sun's rich gladness find beyond.

Then I can say : What matters it that rue
Was in my cup, while others drank but wine !
That through the gray my weary feet were led,
While others walked in radiance of the sun !
What matters it to grasp, or to resign,
If, when the joy or bitterness is past,
God makes the trembling balance good at last !

A drop of rain falls on my open page,
And startles me from revery profound.
I glance above. The amethystine clouds
Have floated to the zenith, and obstruct
The golden flood poured from th' advancing sun ;
But still their opaque edges, violet deep,
They upward roll to catch the streams of light,
And show their lining still is silver bright.

The crystal drops are falling thick and fast.
I hear a sound of rapid footsteps near ;
Of merry tones, and laughter ringing clear,
And close my book—although my sketch, indeed,
Is but an outline crude—then rise, and wait
Their coming, which is near. For, breathed with
haste,

And fleeing from the chase of Summer shower,
They soon are at my side.

“Quick ! in the wood,”

Cries Mr. Denham, “till the rain is past !
’Twill give you shelter for the time at least ;
’Tis but a passing shower,—it will not last,
The diamond globules fall too thick and fast.”

And hastily his bidding we obey,
Forgetful of the dread it had inspired
Short space before, and only eager now
To ’scape the deluge which the clouds o’erhead
Are pouring from their vi’let depths. The wood
Has lost its terror on a near approach—
To Sylvie, even, who “for all the gold
Hung from the rainbow’s arch, by night or day
Would never enter here !” Her laugh rings sweet
Along these silent aisles, as she submits
To sharpest raill’ry on her recent fears—
Her late aversion, forcibly expressed,
To entering a place so filled with ghosts.
But saucily the child retorts in kind,
And claims her woman’s right to change her mind.

The wood has lost its terror, as I said.
And though it seems a strange anomaly,
A curious freak of Nature, yet, in fact,
It is of natural causes the result.
The trees are pines—not large, but closely set ;
So closely, that the branches intertwine
With density so great no gleam of sun
Can pierce its thick-wove roof. The boughs are
 low,
Scarce six feet from the ground, and uniform
In height, as though by landscape gard'ner shorn ;
And though the topmost ones are waving green,
These, for the want of sunlight's life-fraught beams,
Are dead as though their flowing sap was chilled
By winter's icy frosts. The ground is strewn
To depth of inches with the dead brown spines
Of other years. No briary underbrush
Our steps retarding with its clinging hands ;
No dainty vine its green length trailing o'er
The piny carpet ; and no tiny flower
Its sweet head lifting to the morning breeze,
Gives hint of summer verdure, that lies wide
And warm through all the lovely world outside.

As through the dim gray aisles we slowly stroll,
While fast the summer rain drops soft without—
The girls' sweet laughter banishing the ghosts—
Our guide essays to take my sketching book,
And begs that at my picture he may look.

“No, no !” I answer, with detaining hand.
“My ‘picture’s’ but an outline, incomplete,
And crude in the extreme. To tell the truth,”
I smiling add, “I fear I spent more time
In dreaming, like a girl, than on my sketch.
Although, indeed, my dreams were all unlike
Those of a happy maiden in her teens.
Some day I’ll give the outline tone and hue,
And you shall see, and criticise it too.”

“The outline of your dreams?” he laughing asks.

“Of those as well, perhaps ; I cannot tell.
Some fair day in the future, you may ope
A volume freshly from the press, and find
My dream—and sketch—in colors so precise,
You cannot fail to either recognize.”

“I trust I may ! ’Twould give me joy, indeed,
A picture of this hour and scene to read.
It must be pleasant, truly, thus to own
The conscious power to perpetuate
In pictured words, or penciled sketch, such scenes
As please our eyes this morn—and thrill our *dreams*.”

The last with smiles of mischief. Then he adds :
“But see ! at last we’ve reached the confines grim
Of this dim wood ! and lo, the rain has ceased—
The velvet fields slope greenly from our feet,
And all is bright and gay, and fresh, and sweet.
We’ve left the grey behind us—and the dun ;
And here before us is the glorious sun.”

He spoke so earnestly, and in my eyes
Looked with such meaning glance, I felt at once
’Twas not without design ; that he had guessed
The sorrow and unrest that fills my breast,
And so would fain some cheer and hope impart.
I thanked him gratefully, and from my heart,
But not in words. My eyes, that searched his face,
Brimmed full with sudden tears, and drooped to hide
Their dimness from the man who at my side

Still kept his place, one hand upon the book
I yet retained in mine with partial hold—
While down the shining hills we slowly strolled.

The girls, with Gyp, ran gayly on before,
Through grass still dripping from the summer shower ;
And in the rear good Mr. Mayne had joined
The others of our party, and we heard
His cheery tones, discussing pleasantly
With Mr. Disbrow, topics of the day.
So we pursued our downward, homeward way,
And reached the farmhouse by another path
Than that by which we left it.

Wearied, warm,

I sat within the shady porch at rest,
And watched my late companion, by the gate,
Where still he lingered o'er his brief farewell
To Constance ; who, with downcast eyes, and smiles
Half pleased, half mischievous, the low-toned words
He uttered, listened, happily I knew,
And now and then gave arch response thereto.

And when at last he went, and up the path
She slowly came to join me where I sat,

The rose his words or presence had evoked,
Still lingered warm upon her fair, soft cheek.
And as upon the step, just at my feet,
Herself she seated, I looked down and smiled,
And meeting her half-conscious eyes, I said :
“ I like him well ; he’s kind and true, I know ;
His face, and words, and manner, speak him so.”

“ Indeed he is ! ” she earnestly returned,
While deeper still her cheeks’ soft roses burned.
“ You do not know—’tis scarce two months as yet
Since first I met him, as, for many years,
He’s been an exile from his native land,
And only late returned ; but I’ve a friend
Who’s known and loved him from her early youth—
To whom he’s been a brother ; who I’ve heard
Relate such stories of his kindness, truth,
And bravery, I’ve come to feel, with her,
That there are few who can with him compare
In true nobility and worth.”

“ Take care ! ”

I smiling said, as I arose to go,
Then bent to tap her cheek. “ Do you not know
You stand on dang’rous ground ? of what so high

An estimate of one is oft the base ?
Guard carefully the tender, flutt'ring heart,
From which the issues of a woman's life
Proceed, and make her weal or utter woe.
And God be with and bless you all the way !
If it *must* be that clouds shall come, I pray
He lead you through them to the perfect day."

Her face, which first had crimsoned painfully,
Grew grave and wistful at my closing words ;
And in her dark, uplifted eyes I read
A startled consciousness my words had stirred.
And reading it, I smiled again, and went ;
And left her on her new, strange thoughts intent.

II.

"We were together.

How ? Where ? What matter ?—Somewhere in a dream.

Drifting, slow drifting down a wizard stream.

Whither ? Together : then what matter whither ?"

THE lovely summer, like a pleasure barge,
Wreathed thick from stem to stern with garlands
bright,

Of lilies woven, gleaming waxen white,
And roses, blushing to their fragrant hearts ;
With canopy of silver-fretted blue,
Fringed deep at times with purple and with gold ;
And streaming pennons, gay with many a hue—
Green, amber, crimson, violet, and rose ;
And fanned by breezes from the South's soft clime,
Drifts swiftly down the silent tide of time.

Though gay with banners, and with wreathen
flowers,
'Tis freighted deep with human destinies,
Which shall, perchance, ere turning of the tide,
Be made or marred, as they—and God—decide.

The voyagers are many : some are gay,
And dance and laugh the speeding time away ;
And some are sad, and watch the silver tide,
To see how rapidly the barge doth glide
Out to the ocean of Eternity ;
And some are careless of the cabled hours,
And let them idly slip from heedless hands,
As though they were but ropes of fading flowers ;

And some have learned their priceless worth, and
hoard

Each parting strand, as does the miser old
His precious store of hard-won, oft-told gold.
And so the barge floats with the flowing tide !
So swiftly onward does the summer glide !

Our pleasant party still remains unchanged,
And we, too, drift, and dream the hours away !
And theirs are rose and golden—mine are gray !
Yet side by side we float adown the stream,
And each is wrapped about with her own dream.
The past fills mine—the present theirs alone.
For as the summer drifts with rapid flow,
And days grow brilliant, nights more wondrous fair,
The verb “to grasp” they learn to conjugate,
And I the harder lesson, “to resign.”
'Tis play to them—to me a bitter task,
Conned o'er with weariness, and tears, and sighs ;
With aching head and heart, and brimming eyes.

Ah, such is life ! to one the bubbling wine,
The bitter rue to others. It is hard
To *ever* be from pleasant draughts debarred,

And with the rue of life be quite content.
God give us help—us who in sorest straits
Are tempted oft to question and rebel.
Teach us to feel that what He gives is well,
How sweet or sad soe'er. And, for the rest,
To trust, whate'er our fate, *He knoweth best.*

I said our party still remains unchanged.
I should have added, save for one, a youth
From yonder parsonage among the trees,
By name Alaric Eadmer—who of late
Has often joined us in our walks, or come
To swell our number when at eventide
We sit within the porch so cool and wide,
And list the katy-dids and croaking frogs ;
And crickets chirp ; and corn-fly's rasping tick ;
And watch the shifting shadows idle play
In yon deep vale below. I scarce need say
That pretty Sylvie is the lure which draws
Him hitherward, and makes his life at once
A torment and a pleasure. She exhausts
On him her pow'rs of teasing ; then relents,
And is so kind, and so bewitching, too,
The boy is half beside himself with joy,

And taxes all his pow'rs the girl to please,
And tempt to graciousness the little tease.

To-day we spent in Sylvie's favorite nook
Beside the lake, whence flows the mountain brook
That sparkles silver-clear short space away.
This time by Mr. Denham's wish expressed.
Had we been sharp, or wise, we might have guessed
Some secret hid beneath his earnestness,
And spoiled of his surprise the full success.
But we were innocent ; and when he said
Last eve to me : " Miss Wheaton, I have found
Another sight, more curious than all,
Which you will like to view. Then shall I come
And lead you thither on the morrow morn ?
And as 'tis on the way, what say you all
To spending by that lovely mountain lake
Where first we met, the hours that may remain ?"—
We gave assent, nor guessed a purpose lay
Beneath that careless manner hid away.

" See ! is not that romantic in extreme ?"
He asked this morn, when, at a sudden turn
The roadway in down which we slowly strolled,

A total change of scene before us rolled
Its panoramic canvas, green and gold.

Before us, cool with shadows, for a space
Crept, windingly, the hard brown road, then climbed
A distant hill, and so ran out of sight.
On one hand lay a level meadow wide,
Swept with a flood of sunlight, soft and warm ;
And 'mid its golden greenness, here and there,
Great rifts of scarlet and of yellow, told
Where stately meadow lilies reared their heads.
Between, a brook, which showed, far up its stream,
A silver fall that turned the mill beside ;
While on the other hand, a grove of pines,
Tall, proud and stately, tossed their plumèd heads,
Repellant of each amorous advance
Made by the gay young breeze that flitted by ;
And, through the shady interstices seen,
A cool, soft carpet of the deepest green,
Invitingly its velvet lengths unrolled ;
'Twas woven thick with checkerberry vines,
And dainty ferns, and spangled o'er with gold ;
While, mingled sparsely with the tasseled pines,
Were bronze-green oaks, and maples lighter-hued,

Which stretched their spreading arms in gen'rous love
To clasp the haughty pines which tow'ed above.

“We'll take the pathway through the grove, I
think ;

You'll find it softer, cooler to the foot
Than is the dusty road.” So said our guide,
When we had gazed upon the picture wide
And beautiful, till each was satisfied.
And we were glad its dusk depths to explore,
So cool and tempting did they spread before.

Said Sylvie as we ling'ring paced along ;
Or paused to list some thrilling gush of song
Which, like a joyous welcome, floated down
From swaying boughs o'erhead ; or stooped to pluck
Some dainty-flower, or fern-leaf wondrous fine ;
Or on some fallen tree-trunk half recline
While drinking in the loveliness around :
“ Ah, Mr. Denham, please ! what have you found
To show us now ? Another eerie scene,
Wild, drear, and grim, to scare from us our wits,
And make us shake with horror ? ”

And he laughed,

And answered pleasantly : “Nay—patient be,
And you ere long the wondrous sight shall see.
Tis not a wood, filled full with ghastly ghosts ;
Nor yet a mighty, but insensate host,
Awaiting sepulture in fitting tomb,
Or voice prophetic, which, with clarion tone
Shall bid the winds give back the long-spent breath.
It will not be suggestive of grim death,
E’en to Miss Wheaton—else I much mistake ;
But rather of rich life, which clings to earth
With most tenacious grasp, though slight its hold
Upon the strong, life-giving, crumbling mould.”

The curious smile with which he paused, gave hint
Of deeper meaning in his careless words,
That at the first appeared. He smiled again
More broadly, and with mischief, as he caught
The searching glance I bent upon his face ;
But nothing further said.—Nor I—but this :
“’Tis plain that Mr. Denham loves to play
Upon the pow’rful curiosity,
He fancies we, as women, must possess,
And but with difficulty can repress.”

“Nay, nay, you do me wrong !” protested he,
But laughingly. “Would it not spoil the charm
Were you to know just what you might expect ?
And would it not detract, in great degree,
From your enjoyment of whate’er surprise
Dame Nature mayhap has for you prepared,
Were I in detail to describe the thing ?
Moreover, have I not in every case
Made good all I have promised ?—rather, have
I so unduly made attempt to raise
The ‘curiosity’ you may possess,
As that you felt an overwhelming sense
Of disappointment, in observing that
To which I had invited you ?”

“I fear

We must admit the truth of what he claims.”
Thus with a shrug, said I.—“At all events,
He’s passing skillful in his own defense.”

And he—“I fear you must ! But, by the by,
Seest thou the sorry plight of those two pines,
Thus lying, shattered, in their lordly prime,
And dying slowly, tortur’ngly, as dies
A strong man in his strength ? One fair, bright morn

Of this sweet summer time, they towered high
In lofty pride of life ; and shook their plumes,
Fragrant and fresh from morning bath of dew ;
And nodded gaily to the coming sun,
Nor spurned the soft, warm kisses that he gave.
But as the day swift sped, above their heads
Some threat'ning arabesques of sable cloud
Rolled rapidly, and draped the glad, gold sun.
But still they tossed their heads in haughty pride ;
And whispered softly to themselves ; and sighed—
But not for grief, nor yet for sharp regret,
But as a maiden sighs, for very joy
That life bounds warmly, sweetly through her veins.
Then swift, bright shafts of flame broke, trembling,
from

The deep heart of the cloud, and as the torn
And quiv'ring edges met again, a long
Deep moan of anguish from the hurt cloud broke.
But swifter, swifter, came the bursts of flame ;
And louder, longer, rolled the anguished moans ;
And then one fiery shaft, far-reaching, swift,
Burst from the lab'ring cloud, and like a dart
Flung from an Indian bow-string, taut and strong,
It tore its way straight to the lordly heart

Of those poor pines, and wounded, shattered, shorn
Alike of beauty and of strength, they two
Groaned, quivered, reeled, then tottered and fell prone
Within each other's arms ; and like a wreck
Of once proud manhood, lie there, as you see,
While ebbs the life-blood from the stricken heart,
And death comes slowly to each sentient part."

" Alas for thee, poor pines ! alas for thee !"

So I.

And Sylvie : " *Oh!* you make me feel,
And half believe those shattered trees had been
Endowed with human life, and human power
To feel the stroke that felled them in their prime—
The chill of death along their limbs slow steal,
Blighting and with'ring, like untimely frosts
Which chill the heart of summer flowers, ere blow
The winds of autumn."

Mr. Denham laughed ;

And *I* said : " Child, 'tis but a lofty flight
Of wild, poetic fancy, which our friend
Sees fit to thus indulge, with thought to please
Our 'cultivated' ears. In truth, these trees
Are but two pines felled by a thunder-bolt.

He's young, you know, and so is sensitive
To Nature's whims ; and by her is inspired
To grace with imagery poetic, this
Result, and proof of her disastrous pow'r,
On these poor trees exerted, in an hour
Of storm and tempest."

So he laughed again,
Retorting quickly : " I some lessons took,
Not many weeks ago, in that sweet lore.
Have I not swiftly profited—and well—
By your instruction ?"

" Rapidly, indeed !
And also well," I said. " We soon shall see
A full-fledged poet in our friend, in flight
Above his fellows soaring. If he swings
So high at first attempt to try his wings,
What altitude may he not hope to gain,
When use has giv'n his pinions strength ? Ah ! we
Who have aspired Fame's harvest fields to reap,
Must look well to our bays, if we would keep
The laurels we have won."

" Indeed, you must !"
He answered lightly. " Now, shall we walk on ?
For soon the morning freshness will be gone,

And we shall have the scorching noon-day heat
In which to climb yon hills."

So on we roamed,
Through the soft shades, and shifting em'rald glooms,
And left the stricken pines to die alone.
Crossing a tiny brook, which to itself
Was purling softest songs as on it ran,
Said Sylvie : " Mr. Denham, 'twas not, then,
Those two poor trees, whose sad, pathetic tale
You have related to us, that this morn
You led us hitherward to view?"

" Oh, no !"

He answered, smiling. " Those were 'by the way.'
Did I not promise what you were to view
Should give no hint of death or *ghosts* to you,
But rather life, and its tenacity ?
I make my promise good. Behold, and see !"

And then I understood all he had meant
By words and smile, when in like terms before
He had alluded to the curious sight
He'd led us here to see. For as he spoke,
He pointed where, brief space removed from us,
A huge rock lay, embedded deep in soil,

Which yet from base to rugged apex showed
Five feet or more of height ; and from the top,
Twin pines, as tall as once had been those two
Whose fate untimely we had lately mourned,
And straight as tap'ring mast of well-built ship,
Tow'red upward, proud and high. At first it seemed
They had no hold save on the barren rock ;
And we were struck with wonder, that the shock
Of many winters, with their beating storms,
And wildly rushing winds ; and summers, with
Their sudden gales, and tempests raging high,
Had not prevailed to tear them from their place.
But on a nearer view, we found the brave
And sturdy trees had thrown out massive roots,
Which, clothed with bark, crept downward o'er the
rock,
And grasped, with eager hands, the strong, rich soil
In which the stone lay 'bedded. So sustained,
Supported so, the once small saplings grew,
Until they waved their topmost boughs as high
As any of their peers that towered nigh.

And still, 'twas marvelous that in the lapse
Of half a century of stormy years,

No blast more fierce than others had assailed
The brave twin trees, and laid them in the dust.
But they were sheltered, somewhat, from the force
Of tempest-beat, by others that grew close,
Save on one side, by which the shady road
We late had left, wound up the hillside steep,
Which helped to break the wind's wild surge and
sweep.

Observing this put in my mind a thought
Which aided partially to solve one more
Of life's deep riddles to my puzzled heart,
By its experience propounded oft.
And Constance, by my side, whose hand was laid
Within my arm—whose eyes, it seemed, were bent
Upon my face, as, like a brilliant light
Thrown in a darkened room, the good thought came
And whispered to my consciousness, said low :
“ May I not know of what to you it speaks—
That curious rock with its two tow'ring pines ?
I saw a sudden light flash in your face,
And fancied it held meanings deep for you,
Which we of duller senses fail to view.”

I turned, and smiling in her face, replied :
“ Your thought was true. Those trees, sprung from
a cleft
Of that hoar rock, and clinging to the soil
With insecure, but yet tenacious hold,
And breasting thus the storms of fifty years,
Speak not alone to me of buoyant life,
Which still exists, though slight its tenure be,
But, sheltered as they are by sister trees,
And hillside steep, from fiercest stress of storm,
They teach me this : That God, who placed them thus,
Thus guarded them disaster from, and blight ;
Who tempers to the lamb just shorn, His winds,
So shields His frail ones from life’s rougher storms,
Lest in their weakness they uprooted be.
While they whose hold on Him is firm and strong,
Must bear the force of wildest tempest blast ;
And bend to fiercest gales ; and bow the head
To harshest beat of sorrow’s icy rain.
So, stronger for the conflict thus endured
In patience, they become ; and so, more sure
And firm their hold on Him is proven ; so,
The discipline, though sharp and stern howe’er,
And in its workings seeming so severe,

Prepares them for the work they are to do ;
Fits them to shield his tender ones from pain ;
And teaches them to live is not in vain.”

The girl sighed deeply. “ Oh ! it is worth while
That lesson to be taught ! ” she softly breathed.
“ God has to me at times seemed so unjust,
In giving one a happy, peaceful life,
Free from all worriments, and free from pain ;
And others, nobler still, and worthier far
Of all good gifts, of happiness, and love,
Lives filled with sorrow and bereavement, filled
With constant strife, which death alone has stilled.”

“ And me ! ” I answered. “ Bitterly, indeed,
As only those to whom sad lives are given
Could feel it, have I felt God’s justice small
In portioning to some all joy and peace,
To others pain and struggle. Yet I *know*
That He is Justice, Goodness, Mercy, Love,
Impersonated ; while I find it hard—
Ah, He alone can understand *how* hard
I find it—always, *always* to believe.
And *feel* that what He sends is right and best ;

And sent in love ;—to recollect the *test*
Of His deep love, and our adoption, too,
Are these sore chast'nings and rebukes, we find
So grievous and so hard to bear. Thus, blind
With pain, impatient of the heavy strokes
Which cut so deeply our poor quiv'ring hearts,
We do not see God's face of pitying love
Which bends above us—do not see the Hand
Which, though reluctant, gives the stinging blow,
But gives it all in kindness, not in wrath.
And only when the chast'ning stroke is past,
And pain is stilled, do we perceive the gain
It brings to us in strength, and faith, and trust.
How much more deeply have the roots of life
Shot downward for the tempest and the strife."

"I never saw it thus before !" she said.
"I am *so glad* to see it, and to know
Life's storms are needful, good, and sent in love ;
And not in anger or injustice sent
By One whose pow'r is boundless in extent."

"Boundless His pow'r, but boundless too His love,
His mercy, and His justice. But be glad

Indeed, and thankful, if you've learned a truth
So wide and so important, with such ease,
Which many only learn beneath the hand
Of stern Experience, whose flaming brand
Burns on the heart, in letters red with blood,
These deep, grand truths."

Ere she could make reply,
Said Mr. Denham : " Come ! I'm curious
To know the subject which you two are thus
Discussing with such earnestness of tone,
And gravity of aspect. 'Tis not fair,
Miss Constance, nor unselfish, thus to keep,
For your own pleasure, and for yours alone,
The pearls of fine, poetic thought, our friend
In her sweet graciousness to you may lend."

The girl looked in my eyes with knowing smile ;
Then answered saucily : "'Tis not worth while
On every one such precious pearls to waste.
Beside, how know you but the gems were mine,
And lent to her instead ?"

He laughed at this.
" Your pearls are purest water, well I know ;
Milk-white with innocence, and hope, and trust ;

But hers are opaline—‘pearls with a soul,’
And show at every turn prismatic fires,
Now red, now gold, now violet, now blue ;
One finds it difficult to guess what hue
The next turn will develop. Well I know
No thought of yours would make your face so grave,
Or wear such deep intentness ; so I guess
Some word of hers, struck from her heart’s deep fires,
Has touched the hidden springs of your desires,
Hopes, longings, doubts—perhaps all undefined,
Until her thought awoke them to your mind.”

She smiled again, but nothing more vouchsafed
In explanation of our private speech ;
And with her hand still lightly in my arm,
We left the tree-crowned boulder, and pursued
Our way the mountain toward ; and the rest
At leisure followed in our steps. And so
Ere long we reached again the dimpling pool,
Where soft the summer shadows lay, and cool.

There, lightly rocking on the glinting tide,
A tiny shallop we ere long espied ;
With awning flutt’ring in the gentle breeze ;

With carven prow, and gilded stern, on which
In graceful scrolls we read her name—" *The Witch.*"

Then Sylvie clasped her hands in eager joy,
And breathless said : " Oh ! there must fairies be
Here in these woods ; for see ! they've left behind
One of their barges rocking on the lake,
And tied with cobweb rope to yonder stake."

And Constance, too, whose lustrous eyes were wide
With both surprise and pleasure, looked from me
To him, her friend, who, smiling, lingered near,
And said, while brighter grew her blush-rose cheek :
" Ah, this is kind ! for it is you, I see,
We are to thank for this unthought-of treat ;
How did you know we girls had longed to float
On those still waves in such a fairy boat ?"

The man laughed low at her expressed delight,
A richness in his tone which I, at least,
Had never heard before. And then he said :
" This for you girls, and for the poet, this !"
And led the way a little space beyond
Where we had paused, and showed us, in the arch

Where to our view he had appeared that day
When first we met, a tiny, rustic bower,
Built from the fragrant hemlock boughs, which still
Their dark plumes wore ; in form not all unlike
An Indian wigwam ; from whose pointed top
Within, a rustic basket, overflown
With wildwood vines, and ferns, and modest flowers,
Hung pendant ; underneath it stood, in place,
A tiny table, rustic like the rest,
Which bore a vase of water-lilies sweet ;
A book or two, in bindings blue and gold ;
A writing pad, and pencils pointed fine.
An easy chair of wicker-work which stood
Beside, was cushioned soft with thick, rich moss.
The op'ning tow'rd the lake took in as well
The view our friend had found so picturesque,
When, at our banquet, on that soft June day,
He came upon us here.

Touched at the thought

So delicate and flatt'ring, which all this
So plainly spoke, I raised my dimming eyes,
And, silent, laid my hand in his ; for thus
Alone could I my pleased surprise express,
At what his hands had wrought. The laugh was low,

And soft, and rich, with which he made response.
His pressure of my hand was close and warm.
And then he said : “ Now will you try the boat,
Which Sylvie says the fairies left—no doubt
Expressly for our use ? ”

“ I do not know ! ”

I answered him with a reluctance feigned.
“ What think you, Constance ? is it safe to trust
A ‘ Witch,’ and a magician too, who rears,
’Twould seem, a castle at a word ? ”

“ No, no ! ”

He laughing said. “ Not a magician, I !
And what you graciously a ‘ castle ’ style,
Is but a *wigwam*, for a poet built,
By one who claims a share in all the spoils
Of poesy, which hither may be brought
By that aggressive warrior, plumèd *Thought*.”

“ So come ! ” he added ; “ and I guarantee
You shall not be bewitched, although the boat
Be built in Elf-land, and by fairies launched,
As Sylvie tells us.”

“ Can you guarantee
As much for *all* the party, as for me ? ”

I ask him low, and in his face I glance
With smile of mischief, as he takes my hand
To lead me to the boat.

A deep, slow flush
Mounts upward to his brow, and in his eyes,
Which droop to meet my own, a conscious light
Dawns slowly, but he nothing says.

And so
We each, in turn, the fairy shallop try ;
First I—then Sylvie—Constance last of all,
And longest. Slowly o'er the crystal lake,
Which breaks in dimples 'neath the slender oars,
The two float idly in the dainty "*Witch*,"
While I, within the "*Wigwam's*" shade at rest,
Toy with the pencils lying temptingly
Beneath my hand ; and sketch some outlines rough
Of yon fair scene which spreads before me there ;
And watch the pretty idyl write itself
Before my eyes, while I with pleasure read.
The story is not new—I've read it oft ;
Each detail is familiar as the trill
Of wood-thrush on my Wigwam now alight ;
As is the blue that bounds the nether space.
Do I not know the blissful thrill and throb

Which sends the crimson to that girl's fair cheek ?
The fluttering pulse ? the tremulous heart-beat ?
The shy half-consciousness when, careless, meet,
Or accidentally, those thrilling palms ?
Do I not know that ne'er were days so sweet,
Or nights so perfect, since the sun first set
Beyond fair Eden's rivers, as are these
Which make this golden summer ?

Better yet

Than they—the man, at least ! his eyes seem held,
Lest he should read the secret which the girl
Would fain shut deep within her modest heart ;
But, wanting a coquette's deep wiles and arts,
Fails in controlling the electric tide,
Which, surging upward, paints its glowing hues
Upon her cheek's soft pallor ; so betrays,
Unwittingly, the secret she would fain
Hide from all eyes ; which scarcely to herself
Is known as yet, or at the least confessed—
So sly the god who steals within the heart,
And, ere we are aware, plants deep his dart.

Thus reading, as within my fragrant bower
I sit alone, the pencil in my hand

'Gins trace some words upon the paper white ;
Then, gaining force, thus rapidly doth write :

BEWITCHED.

A crystal sea, which lightly washed a shore
In Fairy-land, upon its bosom bore
A tiny barque, where ne'er rocked ship before.

In Elf-land built, by Fairies launched and sailed,
It yielded to each zephyr that prevailed,
And through the waters bright its light keel trailed.

Two mortals paused the mystic sea beside ;
And each the barque, by Fairies built, espied,
Where light it rocked upon the buoyant tide.

They stood, delighted, by the witching view ;
They longed to ride those waves ; yet either knew
A spell was on the ship, and waters blue.

But, standing thus beside the crystal sea—
“ Wilt dare the charm, and enter, love ?” asked he.
Her eyes replied : “ Aye, anywhere, with thee !”

He took her hand, which thrilled his own to meet,
And placed her, blushing, in the shallop's seat ;
Then entered, glad, and found enchantment sweet.

For, rocking idly on the sea's soft swell,
Each felt the influence of the fairy spell,
Yet neither dreamed they were bewitched as well.

That over them the glamour of the hour
Had fallen, with enchantment's magic power,
Which bound and blinded—such its fatal dower.

But when they wearied of the swelling sea,
And from the mystic charm would fain be free,
They felt the net which shackled liberty.

And nevermore could they escape the spell
Which o'er them in the fairy shallop fell ;
For once *bewitched* none can the thrall dispel.

The pad dropped from my hand, and lay upon
The table, unregarded, while my thought
Swept backward through the summer, to the days,
Not many months ago, when I too dared
The spell I just had sung, as rashly, too,
As those now rocking in that tiny boat,
Unconscious of the magic which the hour
Is throwing o'er them with resistless power.
God grant their voyage be less rough than mine—
Their dream become reality more sweet !
And if they may not 'scape the netted thrall,
Be it so fine its meshes cannot gall !

They neared the shore, and slowly paced the path
Which hither led, and soon the Wigwam door

Was darkened with their shadows. From the hands
Of Constance, drooped the delicate limp heads
Of water-lilies, wet with drops of spray,
And all her sweet face was suffused with light—
The glamour of the fairy spell, which still
Was ling'ring o'er her maiden sense. While he—
He, too, I saw, was not insensible
To the bewitching influence of the hour.
And yet his face a fine, vague trouble wore—
Or so I fancied. But ere long his eye
Fell on the pad with idle lines scrawled o'er,
And with a smile he said : " Ah, I perceive
The warrior *Thought* has brought to you some spoils,
Which I, by our agreement, am to share—
Or by my stipulation, at the least,
To which your silence gave a kind consent.
I'll therefore take my portion now, an' so
It pleases you, good Queen."

My hand I half
Extended, to prevent his capturing
The "spoils" my thought had brought me, but again
Withdrew it, and permitted him to read
The careless words my pencil there had traced.
And as he read, I watched his mobile face,

Where once again the slow flush 'rose and flamed ;
While plainer now became the troubled lines
I fancied I had seen, until they grew
To marks of actual pain. Upon my face
He bent one long and searching glance, as he
The last words read, then coolly tore the leaf
Which bore my pencil's trac'ry, from the pad,
And folding it, within his pocket book
Most carefully he placed it.

“ Well ! indeed

That's cool ! ” I said. “ Does what you call your
‘ share ’

Include the *whole* of what my loyal Thought
Shall to my Wigwam bring ? ”

“ In this case, yes ! ”

He answered, with a laugh which seemed half forced.
And when from Constance came a like protest—
A plea that she might share the “ spoils ” as well,
He answered, with another low, forced laugh :
“ Nay ! this is mine—the whole ! I recollect
Who was so selfish as to keep the pearls
Bestowed on her in yonder wood below,
And would not, e'en with me, their luster share.
Revenge is sweet. Think you I can forbear

To taste it, when I have it in my power ?
Ask me perhaps in more auspicious hour,
And I may grant your wish. Remember, though,
I do not promise ; and that it must be
Far in the future that you make your plea."

He spoke with playfulness, and yet I felt
An undertone of troubled pain beneath
The light words lay. I knew my idle lines
His mind had wakened to full consciousness
Of all the peril which these summer days
Might possibly be pregnant with, to her—
The girl who stood beside him, wrapped around
With innocence and guileless truth—e'en though
He from all danger might himself be free.
But this I did not think ; yet I confess
That, if he loved her, I could scarcely guess
Why such a consciousness should cause distress ;
And if he doubted, I felt well assured
He would not, long ; and if he loved her not—
Ah, then—God pity her ! but even then
'Twere better that the waking come at once.
And so no more I vexed myself at thought
Of what might be the outcome of the lines

I carelessly had written, and he read ;
But felt that in his honor and his truth
I might all confidence repose, and know
That he'd take counsel of the right, and act
As that should dictate.

All the day there seemed

A soft constraint upon him, and a deep,
Unwonted thoughtfulness, which now and then
Became abstraction for a little space,
From which he 'roused himself impatiently.
I noticed, too, he bent a furtive glance
At times on Constance, and I fancied he
Would fain be certain just how far her thought
Had trenched beyond the friendship he had sought.

If Constance felt his manner's subtle change,
She but betrayed it in the shy reserve
Which led her at my side to keep her place,
All down the homeward way. He said good-bye
Before our gate, and promising again
To see us soon, with one more ling'ring glance
At Constance' half averted face, walked on,
And soon was lost to sight.

We sat this eve

As often, in the porch, but he came not,
As has of late his frequent custom been ;
And while Miss Sylvie, with exhaustless flow
Of repartee, tormented and bewitched
By turns the youth who lingered at her side,
I saw that Constance scarcely could repress
The restlessness which grew yet more intense,
With every passing moment ; till at last
Herself she seated on the step, and leaned
Her cheek against my knee ; while I caressed
Her throbbing temples, and my cool hand pressed
Upon her burning cheek. I think she felt
The sympathy I uttered only thus ;
For, ere she rose, she softly drew my hand
To meet the ling'ring touch of her sweet lips,
And pressed it warmly, ere it was released,
In both of hers.

But soon we said good-night,
And separated. For the air grew chill,
And heavy lay the mists on vale and hill ;
And sleep came soft to each—and all was still !

III.

“ There are some things hard to understand ;
Oh, help me, my God, to trust in Thee !”

All day the swiftly-dropping summer rain
Has fall'n with refreshment on the flowers,
And waving trees, and rip'ning grass and grain ;
Each drinking thirstily the grateful drops,
And, holding 'neath them all their dusty robes,
Have washed them clean, to greet the sun's warm
glance,
When from the dripping clouds at last he breaks.
All day the mists have wrapped the mountain peaks ;
And o'er the valleys brooded low and soft ;
Or, lifting their white wings, have upward flown
A little space, to flutter down again,
And poise their quiv'ring pinions o'er the vales.
All day the skies have worn their robes of gray,
Nor once displayed the azure hid away.

Beneath my window, on the moss-grown boards
Which roof the porch wherein we sat last eve,

The rain has pattered soft the whole day through ;
Now with a dreary monotone, which wakes
A corresponding gloom within my heart ;
Now with a rhythmic harmony of sound,
Which backward sends my mem'ry, through the years,
To one once loved—to one resigned with pain—
Who loved to list the music of the rain.

Shut in my room, while softly beats without
The summer storm, the constant surge of thought
Through the remote and nearer past, has brought
An avalanche of olden pain—and new—
Upon my shrinking heart. The *old* a dull
Sad throbbing wakes ; the *new* a sharp, wild thrill,
That beats and quivers through each tortured pulse,
With all the pow'r a present anguish owns—
And breaks at times in sighs, and tears, and moans.

So strong its pow'r, so deep and near the pain,
When Constance in my room this evening came,
And silence for a space between us fell,
I, quite forgetful of her presence here,
To Mem'ry's whispers lent a weary ear,
Until my heart again throbbed fierce and strong,

And burning tears, unheeded, filled my eyes.
And then her loving arms were 'round my waist,
And kneeling at my side, her eyes all moist
With sympathy, she looked up in my face,
And said, her sweet lips trembling as she spoke :
“ Dear friend, since that first morn on which I came
A stranger to you all, and in the porch
Presumed to join you, where you stood to view
The scene now so familiar to us grown,
And, turning, in my face you sweetly smiled,
I've loved you, as I think few women love
Another woman, howe'er sweet and good.
In that first hour, I fancied, with a thrill,
How sweet 'twould be if I might call you friend :
If I might sometime kneel beside you thus,
And looking in your face, read in your eyes
The love I give to you in kind returned.
And you were gracious truly, and have made
Most happy to me all these summer days
I've spent with you, here, in these mountain wilds.
Thus loving you, how could I fail to see
The shadows often deepen in your eyes ;
The sadness gather o'er your sweet, kind face !
Thus loving you, how could I fail to feel

A pang of sorrow for the grief I knew
Lay bitter at your heart ; which you betrayed
In dim, pained eyes, and quiv'ring, ash-pale lips !
I never have presumed to even guess
The nature of so deep and strong a woe.
But now, dear friend, I've grown more bold, and ask
You give to sorrow words, and let my love
And sympathy what balm it may, though small,
Apply, to heal the wound your heart has known,
Nor suffer thus in silence and alone."

Her sweet voice faltered, and she ceased to speak.
I gazed a moment in her loving eyes,
While silently the tears fell from my own—
Then turned away my face. I could not tell
This young and happy girl, whose untried heart
Had known no deeper pain than that she felt
At sight of mine, the story of my grief.
I could not put in words—whose utmost sense
Her heart must fail to comprehend, until
She too has knelt in agony beside
Vailed, weeping Sorrow, in Grief's innermost
And darkest sanctuary—all the pain,
And all the dreary sickness of the soul,

Which makes my days so wretched, and my nights
Seem endless, often, wearying for the morn.
And so I turned my face away from hers,
And made no answer to her pleading words.

So, for a time, she still in silence knelt
Beside me, with her soft and tender cheek
Pressed to my shoulder ; then she said again :
“ You will not think, dear, that I wish to know
Why thus, day after day, I see you grieve,
From curious motives, for you’ve surely found
My love is far too tender and sincere ;
And that I hold you in such rev’rence, dear,
I *could* not on your sorrow thus intrude,
Save for the hope that in my sympathy
You might perchance a moment’s solace find,
And that the utterance of your bitter grief,
Might give your heart at least a slight relief.
For *your* sake, dear, your confidence I seek.
I’ve heard it said, ‘ The grief that doth not speak,
Whispers the o’er-fraught heart, and bids it break.’ ”

I smiled with bitterness. “ *My* heart,” I said,
“ Is made of sterner stuff. If pain, intense

And constant ; grief, unspoken by the lips
That often writhe with agony ; regrets
As sharp as unavailing ; and a stern
And bitter sense of loss, borne silently,
Could break a heart, mine had long since been dead,
Nor proved its life by quiv'ring now with pain
Which to allay the utmost skill were vain."

I turned, and took her face between my hands,
And looked into the eyes as wet as mine.
"Dear child," I said, "I do not doubt your love,
Nor your discretion. Doubt not you would prove
Your interest by list'ning to the tale
Which I could tell you, would it aught avail,
With eyes as dim as these my kisses press,
And soft heart throbbing hard with tenderness
And sorrow at my pain. Know you would give
Sweet testimony of your sympathy,
In such caressing as the sorest heart
Could not but leap with gladness to receive.
But still, I cannot tell you what you ask.
When you have walked with Sorrow, and have felt
Her hand pressed heavily upon your heart,
Striking therefrom the buoyancy and life ;

When you have seen your fairest hopes lie dead ;
When you have sat with bowed and aching head
Before the ruins of some idol, reared
On highest pedestal within your heart ;
When you have known just what it is to part
With one who seems a portion of yourself,
And know it is for life, then come to me,
And you shall ask me, darling, what you will,
And I will do my best your wish t' fulfill."

Still gazing in her sweet and changeful face,
I paused a moment ; then I said again—
And with a pang of sharp, prophetic pain :
"My love, I fear that time will come too soon !
Your heart is far too deep, too rich with love,
Your nature too intense, too delicate
In tone and fiber, to escape the pain
Which is the heritage of such a soul.
As I was saying to you yester-morn,
It is the strong who ever suffer most,
Not those who are the weakest. Strength to love,
Strength to enjoy, to grasp, to hope, to trust ;
And strength to suffer and resign, to feel
The sharpest tortures of despair and pain,

Go hand in hand together, and are found
But in the souls which God makes strong and brave,
Endows with sensitiveness most profound,
And with all delicate perceptions, and
All sweet and subtle depths of tenderness.
'Tis only such that ever stand alone
And face to face with sorrow. Only such
Who learn life's deepest lessons, which are given
To discipline the heart, refine the soul,
To elevate the mind, subdue the will,
And to perfect the character. And these
Reach heights sublime, which weaker souls, or hearts
Though happier, can ne'er attain. Reach heights
Where Happiness doth never lead the way,
Though, chastened and refined, she sometimes waits
Upon the mountain-top they gain through toil,
The highest and the purest hopes t' fulfill
Of those who've learned to 'suffer and be still.'"

"As *you* have learned !" she said, with tender kiss.

"Ah, no, dear child !" I quickly made reply.
"I learned it once, and found upon the heights
To which I climbed through suff'ring stern and strong,

If not pure Happiness, with beaming eye,
And cheek aflush with deep and perfect joy,
Yet, waiting there, was sweet-faced, calm Content.
But now I, suff'ring, fret, and oft rebel
At what I once bore patiently and well."

"But still in silence ! Dear, is it worth while
To be so strong, if one in consequence
Must tread such deeps of sorrow ? To attain
To even such proud heights, if but through toil,
And pain, and strife, the mountain top is reached ?
Is not the happier lot that of the weak,
Or the phlegmatic, though they never know
The deeper and intenser joys which we,
Whom you call stronger, may experience—
Since they, you say, will likewise be debarred
From all the pain we strong ones find so hard ?"

I smiled at this. I knew she would not give
To her own questions an assent ; that she
Was proud to feel that strength was giv'n to her
In larger measure than it is to most ;
That she, if bidd'n to choose between the two—
Strength, with its heritage of bitter pain,

And ecstasy of happiness as well ;
Or weakness, with its lighter griefs and joys—
That strength would be her proud, spontaneous choice.

Something like this I answered. Adding then :
“ If you six months ago had questioned thus,
With naught of hesitation I had said—
‘ Aye, well worth while !’ Still on the mountain top
Whose outlook was so broad, its view so grand ;
Still satisfied and filled with rare content—
The pain, and long, sore struggle all behind—
I felt ’twas good to suffer, this to reach.
But now—again in Sorrow’s troubled deeps,
From which the heights loom far beyond, above ;
And fearful that my oft-tried, suff’ring heart
Holds not reserve of strength to do its part
To reach the altitude it lately lost ;
And weary of the struggle, I perchance
Might answer—*‘ Nay, oh, nay !’* could I forget
That *this* life is not all—is but, indeed,
The stepping-stone laid midway in the brook
Between what was, and what is yet to be,
By which we reach a shore of silver sand,
Which leads us to a fair and goodly land,

Whose smoothest reaches, and whose lowest hills
Stretch higher than the topmost mountain peaks
We here, by toilsome climb, may hope to reach.
Rememb'ring this—and that through suffering
Our souls grow strong, refined, and purified ;
That 'tis a wise and tender Hand which sends
The discipline so grievous to be borne ;
That it is thus He fits us to enjoy
The higher pleasures of that goodly world—
And thinking of that life, so full and sweet,
So perfect in its joy, and so complete
In satisfaction and content, I should
Unto my soul's most deep convictions, gained
By years of strife and pain, prove most untrue,
Were I to answer '*Nay, oh, nay !*' to you."

" 'Tis not in vain then, dear, you once have stood
Upon the heights—e'en though it may be true,
As you have said, that now you dwell below—
Since what you there have learned you still must
know ! "

" Nay, not in vain, perhaps—and yet—and yet—
Of what avail once to have gained a safe

And pleasant harbor, sheltered from the storms
Which marked the passage thither, if, indeed,
The next tide lifts your frail and battered bark,
And bears it backward to the stormy sea
So lately crossed with peril, where you find
Your sore-tried strength inadequate to breast
The waves that bear you farther from the shore—
Or dangers just escaped to brave once more ! ”

“ Dear friend, your strength is greater than you
know.

Far higher now, although in Sorrow's deeps,
You stand, than I, who those precip'tous steeps
Have scarce begun to climb. So high, indeed,
I wonder, darling, you can reach my hand,
From that grand altitude at which you stand.”

I kissed her for reply, and silence came
Between us for a moment ; then I said :
“ You say my strength is greater than I know ;
To me it seems but weakness, and the way
I once passed o'er to reach the mountain top,
So rugged I can climb it never more.
The eyes of Faith are dim ; Faith, whose clear sight

I once had thought no pain could make less bright ;
And Hope, once ever joyous at my side,
Sustaining, cheering, now to me is dead ;
And I, despairing, seek no more to reach
The place from which the hand of human pain,
And human longing, has beguiled my soul,
And left me, bruised and bleeding, on the plain,
Far, far below the height I hoped to gain."

" Ah, but I know 'twill not be always thus.
Your open wounds must sometime cease to flow,
And you, so full of strength, must from the blow—
Whose cruel force I truly can but guess—
Rally at last, and reach diviner heights
Than those from which you've wandered for a time.
My heart is all untried in sorrow's fire ;
Its hurts are merely trifling, when compared
To those from which you suffer, but I *know*
God, who has led you once by higher paths
Than many walk, will never leave you thus,
Stricken, and sorrowing, and weak with pain,
To lie unsuccored on life's bleak, bare plain.
I'm sure the lovely patience, trust and faith
You once have shown, are not forgot by Him ;

And that He leads you still, though Faith is dim ;
And Hope has, like a traitor, flown your side
His love is left, dear friend, love that abides,
And shall ere long bind up your bleeding wounds.
I *know* the time will come when you again
Shall feel your olden strength in every vein."

"Sweet comforter," I said, "perhaps 'tis so !
God knows I do not doubt His will, or power
Thus to restore the peace my heart has lost ;
I but mistrust my own exhausted strength,
My nature's weakened forces, which forbid
The effort so essential on my part,
If I would hope to give my weary heart,
Now on the waves of passion fiercely tossed,
The ease, and peace, and rest it lately lost.
God never works alone in human souls ;
He comforts, aids, sustains, sometimes controls ;
He guides, and *leads* us ; but He bids us tread
By force of inborn strength the path marked out ;
He lifts us when we fall ; supports, and cheers
When our weak steps are falt'ring by the way ;
But only bears the *lamb*s upon His breast.
And so, although His *pow'r* to give me rest

I do not doubt, nor yet His gracious *will*,
I'm of my strength to climb distrustful still."

"But it will come! For will not time do much
To heal all gaping wounds—yea, even such
As those you, darling, bear? As I just said,
Of this I nothing know by trial sad;
But if the pain you suffered in the past
Could find, though not till long, relief at last—
Relief so perfect you could even joy
Thus to have borne and suffered, may you not,
Dear friend, believe that there will come an hour
When you shall break the bands of sorrow grim,
And rise triumphant? When the faith now dim
Shall grow e'en clearer-visioned than before,
And joy, and hope, and trust be yours once more?"

"I cannot tell! It may, perchance, be so.
God only knows, and time alone can show.
I only see the darkness is intense
Which now enfolds me; I can only feel
My heart lie nerveless 'neath the cruel blow
It has sustained; that from it courage, hope,
And life seem stricken evermore. But see!

The clouds are scatt'ring from the glowing west,
While with his usual pomp the King of Day
Sinks fast to his repose. In what deep shade
That lovely valley lies, while bright upon
Those lofty mountain peaks, the golden light
Rests like a crown of glory ! Thus in life !
Those in the valley dwell in shadows deep ;
Those who have climbed the tow'ring mountain-steep
May bathe in radiance of the setting sun,
And joy in light although the day be done."

I sighed, regretting still the lofty height
From which my feet had wandered ; then I turned
And looked on her who still knelt at my side.
Her face was rosy as the sunset clouds ;
Her eyes were scintillant with eager light,
As with a smile she looked up in my face,
And said : " Dear friend, although the whole day
through,

The skies have shown us only gray—no blue—
The clouds are broken now, and taking flight,
Heaven's own soft blue revealing to our sight.
Dear one, believe '*At eve it shall be light !*' "

She kissed me softly, ling'ringly, then went ;
But left within my heart of sweet content
More than for months its troubled pulse had known ;
By one of God's own babes truth had been shown,
And she had giv'n more comfort than she knew—
This young, fair girl, untried in grief, 'tis true,
But with such full, rich store of faith divine,
Of hope and trust, it could but strengthen mine.

“Dear child !” I said. “May He who portions out
To all, the measure of His discipline,
Of pain and sorrow send her tender heart
Only such trial as it needs, to make
The sunset of her life as bright and fair
As that which glows in beauty over there !”

PART THIRD.

RUE.

PART THIRD.

RUE.



I.

“O Love ! sweet, sweet, thy summer dream ;
But deathly bitter was the waking.
O Heaven ! hast thou a peace supreme
Enough to pay a heart for breaking ?”



THE August moonlight, cool, and still, and pale,
Lies soft on mount and meadow, hill and vale ;
Picks out the carven fret-work of the trees,
Which sway and flutter in the evening breeze ;
Kisses the faces of the sweet, shy flowers,
Which all illumined grow beneath its touch ;
And lingers tenderly around the two,

Who, by yon swinging gate short space away,
Now half in shade, now in the full, rich light,
Are long in uttering their sweet good-night.

Two weeks have passed since that fair day we spent
Beside the mountain lake, and found, surprised,
The tiny boat upon its waves afloat ;
When I, for Mr. Denham, careless wrote
The lines that woke his sleeping consciousness,
And showed him what might be to him, to her,
The unforeseen results of these sweet days
Of unrestrained companionship, to each
So dear and pleasant—but to one, at least,
So dang'rous too—and this bright eve's the first
In which he has, since then, on us conferred
The pleasure of his presence. We have missed
In all our morning rambles, his kind face,
His pleasant talk, intelligent and gay,
His helpful hand along the rugged way ;
And all our evening gath'rings in the porch
Where hitherto he's joined us oft, have seemed
Quite incomplete without him. To us all—
But most to Constance. Hide it as she might
By gay assumption of the cheerful ease

Which we had learned to know habitual,
I saw she wearied for his presence ; knew
The days seemed endless while he lingered far ;
And that the restlessness I know so well,
Which is so hard to bear, to hide, to quell,
Had banished all the quiet from her heart,
And from the brilliant days, and misty nights,
Their wonted peace and sweetness.

In her eyes,

So soft, so dark and lustrous, had, 'tis true,
A deeper splendor come ; but in them, too,
A vague dissatisfaction beamed ; a faint,
Dim, troubled light they had not known till now,
But which I read too well. “ Ah, child !” I thought,
“ ‘ Her lot is on you, silent tears to weep,
And suff’ring smiles to wear through sorrow’s hour ;
And sunless riches from affections deep
To pour on broken reeds—a wasted shower !
And to make idols, and to find them clay !
And to bewail that worship.’ Woman’s lot !
So hard, so bitter, full of longing pain,
Which few among her finest souls escape.”
For though this cloud she felt enwrap her now,
Might be a shadow brief, and “ flung before

From some effulgent substance out of sight ;"
Although this new-born love might find at last
A full fruition ; though its object prove
As generous and noble, true, and kind,
As now we think him, yet I knew e'en then
There would be flaws, to which not even love
Forever could be blind ; and that a day
Would come when she would find her idol clay ;
That she had poured upon a broken reed
A show'r of love, that not e'en he could quite
Appreciate or understand. For this
Was " Woman's Lot ;" and must be borne by all
Whose hearts, like hers, are deep, and warm, and
strong ;
And who have suffered over them to fall
Love's most bewitching, but deceptive thrall.

We sat this eve within the porch below—
I, Mrs. Disbrow, Constance, Sylvia,
When up the path there came young Mrs. Brown,
And, running on before, her lovely boy,
Just rounding his sweet second year. A child
One longs to clasp and kiss at every glance.
A merry, sweet, and charming boy, with eyes

As blue as April violets ; and mouth
So sweet, and arch, and kissable, with teeth
Like tiny pearls in ruby coral set.
Round, dimpled cheeks, and broad and open brow,
With loose, soft, clustered rings of golden hair.
A perfect child, which wins one's love at once ;
And now came, eager for the petting sweet,
And merry frolic he was sure to meet.

As up the steps he bounded, and I caught
The lovely boy within my clasping arms,
And covered his sweet face with kisses, while
His mother, smiling, proud, stood by, I chanced
At Mrs. Disbrow carelessly to glance,
And saw her whiten to the lips, then rise,
And pass within the house. With deep surprise
I glanced at Constance, and she too was pale ;
But answered to my look : “ It is the child.
My sister lost a lovely, two-year boy,
Scarce one brief year ago, in whom her heart
Was utterly bound up. For six long weeks
She held him in her arms, and saw him fade—
Her sweet wild-flow'r—and knew that he must die,
Yet would not give him up. ‘ He must not die,

I cannot, will not lose him !' she would say.
'Why did God give him me, if but to take
Him from me now, and break my heart ! He's mine !
God has no right to take him from my arms ;
I will not, cannot give him up !' And so
Day after day she strove against grim Death ;
But he was pitiless, and came at last,
And tore her idol from her clinging grasp.
'Twas terrible to hear her thus rebel
Against God's love and power, knowing well
How impotent she was to stay the Hand
That coveted her darling ; but 'twas worse
To see her agony of grief, and her
Delirium of despair, when, marble cold
And still, her lovely boy lay in her arms,
And gave back no response to her wild kiss.
Awhile we thought she would go mad, or die,
The strain had been so long, and so intense ;
Her grief was so rebellious and so deep ;
But she at last grew calm—though not e'en yet
Is she submissive to the will of God,
Who took her darling from her. So she makes
Her burden all the harder to be borne.
And not e'en yet can she endure the sight

Of happy mothers with their lovely babes.
And though she little says, I know the thought
Which is most bitter, is that she's bereaved
Of her one lamb, while other hearts o'erflow
With mother-love, and other homes are sweet
With baby voices, and their patt'ring feet."

The little story touched us to the heart,
And made us feel a pity most profound
For that poor grieving mother ; and I said—
As closer in my arms I clasped the child,
Who had, unconscious, woke her grief afresh,
And with an envious pain and passion filled
The heart, undisciplined, rebellious still:
"'Tis but another instance of the truth—
So sad to us who suffer, but to us
Who trust God's love through all, and understand
'Tis but in tenderness His chast'ning hand
Is laid upon our lives, so sweet withal—
That while to one 'tis giv'n to grasp and keep
The fullness of desire ; to deeply drink—
Scarce conscious of the sweetness of the draught,
Because familiar grown—the joys of life ;
From other lips the goblet soon is dashed,

And shattered lies, its ruby wine all spilled ;
While they who fain would drink, thus early find
To them 'tis given only to resign
All that their hearts have coveted or gained.
Ah, happy they, who, while they suffer sore,
Sweetly submit, and, bending to His will,
Find He can make the balance even, still !”

A step familiar, springing, brisk, now rang
Upon the walk, the gate closed with a clang,
And glancing up we saw the well-known form
Of Mr. Denham, as he swift approached
The place where we were sitting. As I said,
Two weeks have passed since that last day we spent
Beside the lake, since when he has forborne
To make one in our midst. The cause was plain
And simple, as we knew it, yet I guessed
There was another reason unexpressed.

Two mornings after that delightful day,
He came with Gyp, and rod and gun, to say
’Twas his intention an extended tramp
To take among the mountains, with the friend
Whose hospitality had lured him here.

He might be gone a week, or more, or less ;
Hoped we would have some pleasant days and walks ;
That he might see us all on his return ;
Charged me to recollect that all which came
As “ spoil ” to yonder Wigwam on the mount,
He was to see and share ; then said good-bye ;
Glanced keenly at poor Constance’ blushing face,
And went regretfully. I did not doubt
He went for game not only, but in search
Of a solution to the problem deep,
My poem had propounded to his mind.
We missed him sadly ; so, well pleased to-night,
We heard the sound of his familiar step,
And eager ’rose to greet him.

Constance tried

Most bravely, her embarrassment, and joy
At his return, from him, and all, to hide,
But could not stay the lovely crimson tide
That all her soft cheek painted. Mrs. Brown,
Her sweet child leading, went within the house.
And Sylvie, with delight, and outstretched hand,
Sprang forward, saying frankly : “ This is grand !
I’m just delighted you’ve at last returned ;

We've missed you fearfully, and every day
Have scolded that you made so long a stay."

He laughed, and pressed her pretty, proffered hand,
And for her kind remembrance thanked the girl ;
Was glad he had been missed ; and glad to find
We all were here to welcome his return ;
Then with the slow flush mounting in his cheek,
As twice before I'd seen it rise and flame,
He turned to Constance, standing at my side
With downcast eyes ; whose smiling, trembling lips
Scarce to his kindly greeting could reply
In uttered words—whose face a story told
She would not have revealed for untold gold.

And then came Mr. Mayne ; and then the boy
Who daily homage to sweet Sylvie pays ;
And each extended to our friend, returned,
A glad and cordial welcome. Then the night
Fell silently around us ; at the first
In deep'ning violet shadows ; flooded then
With soft, pale moonlight, falling in a shower
Of silver radiance on each open flower,
And tree, and shrub, and distant mountain-peak,

And hushed and slumb'ring valley.

So the eve

Waned swiftly, filled with pleasant chat, and gay
With sweet, soft bursts of laughter. Now and then
I wondered if our friend had pondered well
The subject which had troubled all his thought
When he had left us—if 'twas well with both,
As I so wished it might be. Now and then
I fancied he had words upon his lips
Which he refrained from uttering, perhaps
Because they were not meant to fall upon
The ears of all our number. Now and then
I thought of that poor mother, with a pang
Of sympathy, who, suff'ring from a loss
Which tears her heart with anguish, still rebels,
And thrusts aside the Hand which gave the blow,
And now would fain give comfort, did she know
'Twas Love that did afflict, and that would soothe.
'Tis true I had not known a loss like hers,
And so had earned the right to sympathize
In her rebellious grief, but yet my heart
Had been through deeps of sorrow, and had felt
The bitter pain of loss, and chafed beneath
My impotence to stay the mighty Hand

Which took my dear ones from me. And I, too,
Could understand the sore and envious pang,
The sight of happy mothers with their babes
Gave that poor desolated heart ; for I
Had often grieved that I must be denied
The joy of motherhood—that on my breast
No little tender head of child might rest,
And with soft lips give me that sweetest name
Which to a woman's heart or ear e'er came.

And so the evening passed. The hour grew late,
And weary, I. And so I said good-night,
And left them to their laughter and their chat.
Again, as Mr. Denham took my hand,
And pressed it with unusual warmth, I thought
Some words unspoken trembled on his lips.
If so, they were not uttered. So I came
And left them, with the moonlight and the flowers
To linger out the silver evening hours.

And still I could not sleep, though sore fatigued.
The murmur of their voices, low, indeed,
But constant, floated upward to my ear,
With now and then soft laughter, rippling clear

Through waves of vibrant air ; the soft breeze sighed
The quiv'ring branches of the larches through,
Which near my casement lift their feath'ry boughs ;
The moonlight filtered through them, falling pale
Upon the floor in silv'ry arabesques
Which changed their form with every sighing breath—
All helped to banish the sweet guest I wooed.
Then softly near me drew the troubled Past,
And swept my heart-chords with relentless hand,
Till each vibrated sharp and strong with pain ;
And stern Regret stood by, and turned the leaves,
Until the last sad score, by Mem'ry writ,
Had been played through to the *Finale's* close,
And I was wild with sorrow, and the deep,
Unconquer'ble, and aggravated grief,
Wherein so many elements combined
To banish peace from heart, and soul, and mind.

Thoughts bitter and rebellious, sad, and full
Of sharp regrets, and longings deep and sore,
And sweet suggestions of what "might have been"
Which wait with torture most refined, to spring
Upon an hour unguarded, as was this,
Surged with increasing power through my heart,

Till with their strivings I was well nigh mad ;
And tired with constant tossings to and fro,
I spurned the couch where I had met wild-eyed
And haggard-faced Unrest, in place of Sleep—
Sweet, tender Sleep, with gentle, pitying face,
And hand whose touch is soothing and so soft—
And creeping to the window open wide,
Sank in the chair that always stands beside.

The soft, rich moonlight threw its lum'nous tide
The casement through, and whispered low of peace ;
The cool, sweet breeze caressed my fevered cheek
As if in pity for my ruthless pain ;
And faintly came the scent of countless flowers,
Expressed by evening dews, which heavy lay
Upon their fragrant faces, to my sense
Conveying delicatest sympathy,
As I recalled how sweeter they become,
When, bruised and crushed, they suffer, and are dumb.

And so at last I calmer grew ; the tide
Of anguish, partly spent in force, now surged
In duller throbbings through my wearied heart ;
The still, pale Midnight touched me with her hush,

And quieted in some degree my pain ;
And then I noticed what amid the strife
Of passion raging in my breast, till now
Had 'scaped my ear, that they I left below
Had all dispersed, and silence in the porch
Was regnant now ; and then I saw the two
In yonder shimm'ring moonlight by the gate,
And guessed this hour would make or mar the life
Of that dear girl I'd learned to love so well.
And so awhile forgot was pain and loss,
In fancying the full, rich meed of joy
This midnight hour might bring to her.

And then

They parted, and he went. She lingered still,
Her head upon the gate-post lowly bent
When in the distance died his steps away—
And lingered to tell o'er the beads of joy
In that bright rosary of love, this man
Had, eager, thrust within her willing hand.
Or so at least I fancied ; knowing well
The deep devotion of a woman's heart,
Which counts its joys as eagerly and oft
As devotee her sacred, priest-blessed beads.
Then up the path she slowly came, as though

She in a dream were walking—was it joy,
So new, so deep, so sweet, retarding thus
Her footsteps? or—oh, could it be the first
Sharp lashings of despair had struck the life
And spring from out those supple, girlish limbs?
Thus questioned I, as, leaning out, I watched
Her slow approach. But all so dim and faint
The moonlight brooded 'round her, and sometimes
Was swallowed by the shadows, I could not
My queries answer perfectly.

Ere long

Her feet came up the stairway, slowly still,
As though dragged upward by mere force of will;
And then the door closed softly, and awhile
Deep silence reigned around us; then I heard
A faint, low moan; a half-convulsive sob;
Then silence; while I held my breath to hear
If there were any ground-work for the fear
That filled my heart with sympathetic pain.
And then the deep, half-stifled sob again!
Repeated—till a tempest of them came,
And burst the last frail band of self-control.
I knew the bitter story then—the whole.

Her room is next to mine—the door ajar,
I could not fall to hear, and hearing, grieve
At agony I knew so well—so well !
At last I could no longer bear to sit
In silence here, while such short space away,
She fought supinely with the first wild throes
Of a despair so new to her—which I
Had known in every phase—and give no sign
Of that deep sympathy within my heart.
Ah, here at least I'd earned the solemn right
To sympathize, by suff'ring o'er and o'er
An anguish like to hers. And so I crept
Across the room, and gently pushed the door,
And, without entering, I spoke her name.
She hushed her sobs, and listened. Then I said :
“Constance, come here ! Come, tell it all to me,
And take the sympathy which I know how,
By virtue of like suffering, to give.
I know it all—yet tell me ! for I know
In hearts untried ‘The grief that doth not speak,
Whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break.’”

She came. And with a wild, heart-breaking sob,
She threw herself in my extended arms.

I held her for a moment to my breast,
And pressed my lips in silence to her cheek,
And spoke no word of sympathy. And then
I drew her to the window, and sat down,
Still holding her within my arms, and let
Her sorrow spend itself, in some degree,
In the hot falling tears. And then I said :
“ Now tell me ! I had hoped a happier fate
For you, my love, than these wild tears presage ;
That you at least might 'scape the bitt'rer part
Of ' woman's lot,' that falls so oft to those
Whose hearts, like yours, are strong to love.”

Awhile

She did not answer ; then she said : “ I know
My pain is nothing to what you have borne—
And I have naught to tell. You know full well
How foolish I have been ; how I have thought
Because I—cared—for him, he must for me.
And oh !—I fear I've often let him see
How much—I cared ; and yet—oh, I did try
To hide it deep from his, and every eye.”

“ I know, dear,” answered I ; “ but are you sure
You were deceived ? and that he does not care

As you had thought ? ”

“ Ah yes ! I’m sure ! he’s gone—”
With caught and sobbing breath—“ or goes, at least,
When comes the early morn.”

“ Gone ? ” I exclaimed
In deep surprise, “ and has not said one word
Of such intent, or bidden us good-bye,
Though all the evening here ? ”

“ I think he meant
So to have done,” she answered, “ for he said
Perhaps I’d guessed what all the eve was on
His lips to say—what he had vainly tried
To utter, in the face of such a kind
And cordial welcome as we all had given.
My heart stood still ; for then I guessed indeed
What he would say—and what it meant to me.
These days had been so pleasant—so he said—
Which he had passed with us, it was with dread
He spoke the words which bring them to an end,
For him at least. And then he said : ‘ My friend,
I am *so glad* that I have met you here.
Life has no rarer blessing than a friend ;
And I am thankful I have found in you
What life so rarely gives. More thankful, too,

Than you perhaps will ever know, or guess.'
His voice was very low, and very sweet,
And every word seemed like a fond caress
To my poor foolish heart ; but then I thought
It faltered—for at least he ceased to speak.
And as upon his face the moonlight fell,
I fancied it grew white, as though in pain.
If so he made no effort to conceal
The fact from me ; for in the full, clear light
He stood, and looked with sadness in my face.
I know not what that told him, for my heart
So troubled was, and beat so wild and hard
With pain and with uncertainty, I gave
No thought to what might on my face be 'graved.
His pause was brief, and then he said again :
' How passing fleet a summer's lovely hours,
Though bright and sweet indeed ! and these wane
fast !

Don't think I am presuming, if I say
These weeks to me have glad ones been, each day
A sep'rate pleasure, and a mem'ry sweet.
Or if I ask you sometimes will recall
In brighter hours to come, these perfect days,
And nights so bright and fair, which we have spent

Together here ; and with them think of him—
The friend which they have brought you ?

“ Did he need
To *ask* I would remember ? Did he think
I *ever* could forget ? So spoke my thought,
But I believe I held my trait’rous lips
From giving utterance to it. Indeed,
They seemed so cold and stiff, I doubt they owned
The pow’r to answer—for I said no word.
Perhaps he thought me heedless, or unkind ;
But still I think he could not have been blind
To what was written in the eyes which dwelt
In anguish on his face. It may have been
The shimm’ring and elusive glow, that streamed
So coldly o’er his face, but, as I gazed,
His eyes seemed beaming with a new, soft light ;
His firm lips tremulous, and ashy white,
Though wearing still the smile I know so well.
For what seemed long, down in my face he looked
In silence, then he spoke again. ‘ You’ve guessed
Ere this,’ he said, ‘ that my *good-night* must mean
Good-bye as well. I go to-morrow morn—
I’ve lingered here already far too long ’—
His voice broke with a sigh, then he went on :

‘The hour is late—you’ll bid me then farewell,
And pray God-speed me? first, though, I would ask,
If I your friendship do not press too hard,
You’ll give some portion of your kind regards
To her—the bride, who, doubtless you have known
Awaits my coming in her distant home,
And who will love you well when you shall meet.’
Oh, darling ! can you guess the horrid pain
Which pierced my heart as thus I heard him speak,
And knew at last what all his words had meant ?
I scarcely could believe I heard aright.
I looked up in his face, so deadly white,
And read the truth. Oh, God ! I thought at first,
My heart with that sore knowledge sure would burst.
And for a while I know I upward gazed,
Of aught scarce conscious but his bitter words.
But Pride at last spoke loudly, and was heard ;
I understood ’twas needful I should hide
The agony that tore me, from his sight,
And so stepped backward in the deeper shade.
My head was reeling, and my brain confused ;
How well I wore my mask I cannot tell ;
I think I forced my lips to frame farewell—
A brief congratulation ; and I know

His face was brilliant with a certain glow,
Though pallid still ; and that in trembling tones
He made response : ‘ I never shall forget
Your kindness or your friendship ; and I pray
That God may bless and keep you, wheresoe’er
Your steps may wander. So good-night—farewell !
Aye, *fare thee well !* and if it be for aye,
Still fare thee well—*forever !* ’ ”

She broke off

With one deep sob, and hid her face upon
My shoulder for a moment, while I pressed
My cheek to hers in silent sympathy.
And then she slow resumed : “ He took my hand,
And drew me from the shadow in the light,
Down-gazing in my face, while still his lips
Their sweet smile wore,—and I had thought, perhaps,
He did not care for my too open pain,
Or that this moment was our last—oh God,
Our very last—had they not been so white.
And then he softly said once more, good night,
Released my hand, smiled in my face, and went—
And went forever ! Oh, can it be true ?
Or else—why do I care ! but oh—*I do !* ” .

I held her close in silence, for a time,
While she sobbed out her grief and her regrets,
The while my heart ached for her, for I knew
That this was but the prelude to long days
And weary nights of longing, and of sore,
Unconquered, e'er-recurring misery.
I knew she had not lightly loved, and long
Would be the struggle ere the conquest came.
A conquest which, if gained, would leave her heart
Deep scarred and weary, with the bloom of joy
Forever brushed therefrom—the deep result
Of these few weeks of happy intercourse,
So innocent in seeming, and so sweet.
At last she said : “ Oh, darling, you can't guess
How much you comfort me ! how perfect is
The sympathy you give me in my pain.
I know it is because you've felt the same,
And greater even, so have learned to know
How in perfection sympathy to show.”

“ Oh, yes, I know ! ” I said. “ I've trodden all
The path your tender feet have walked to-night,
And so I know how wild and rough it is.
But if 'twill comfort you—and well I know

It will—I think you may believe that you
Were not the only suff'rer in that hour
So dark and terrible, that he as well
Felt all the pangs of such a hopeless love.
I think he *cares*—but that he did not dream
Where he was drifting, till that last bright day
We spent beside the lake—till words of mine
Awoke him to the danger he was in.
And then you know he went away ; I thought—
And now am sure—to ponder well the facts,
And so decide upon his future course.
I thought he loved you, so I did not doubt
'Twould all be well for both. I had not dreamed
He was already bound. But, dear, at least
To honor him is left, and that is much ;
Aye, *much* ! To love where one cannot respect,
Must be most bitter, truly. And I think
With you, as with myself, it would indeed
Be difficult for love to long survive
Respect and honor ; love cannot abide
In harmony with scorn or with contempt.
And, dear, though hard and bitter 'twas to part
As you to-night have parted, to delay
Had made it harder still ; so it was best

He go at once, and, going, leave unsaid,
Bound as he is, the words you would have heard,
I have no doubt, had he, like you, been free.
And so he keeps his honor—so keeps yours,
And your respect—and love. For love comes not
And goes, with equal ease. Alas, alas
For us, it should be so !”

Then came again
Brief silence. Then said Constance : “ But, dear
friend,
You should not sit here all the night, deprived
Of rest and sleep. I’m selfish, dear, indeed,
So to have kept you.”

“ No, I could not sleep,
Or I had nothing known of what the night
Had brought you,” I replied. “ But I am glad
So to have lost my rest, if you have found
In my deep sympathy a balm, though slight,
For what you suffer.”

“ Ah, not slight is it,
But greater than you know. I had not thought
That *any* so could enter in, so feel
Another’s woe, as you have shown to-night
’Tis possible to do.”

“ Dear child, I too
Through these dark hours down in the depths have
 been,
And almost vanquished been by human pain—
Not new, like yours, but suffered once again
As oft before—which is unconquered still,
Though, for the moment spent, it quiet lies,
And waits the next unguarded hour, to rise,
The contest to renew. Mayhap for me
It has been good to merge in sympathy
The selfish grief by which I was o’er-borne
Ere grew the hour so late.”

“ Oh, dear, dear friend ! ”

The girl exclaimed, as to her knees she slipped,
And clasped her soft arms ’round my waist, as once
Before, when she a like request had made.
“ Why will you not confide to me the pain
Which you so long have suffered, that in turn
I may the sympathy of love give you ?
Believe me, dear, I would *through life* be true.”

“ Oh, Constance, do I doubt it ? No, oh no !
And through the cup you’ve drank this night, you may
Perchance enabled be to understand

The story I will tell you. It is this :
Long years ago, when in my bounding heart
Youth's lambent fires burned warm, a tender hand
Was laid upon my throbbing pulses, which
To rapture leaped beneath the magic touch.
The days were then all gold and rose ; the nights
Mistily beautiful with dreams of joy.
The past was nothing—a forgotten boon ;
The future, blank ; the present, all of life ;—
How sweet, the warmest words would fail to show,
As, led by that dear hand, I wandered on,
On, and still on, through flow'ry vales of bliss,
More beautiful than I had deemed a scene
Of earth could ever be. Nor had I thought
A human heart could know such rare delight ;
A sweetness so intense, and strong, and deep ;
A joy so satisfying, and complete,
As that which swelled to music's rhythmic beat
Within my heart, each string vibrating strong
With rapture exquisite, at every clasp
Of that firm hand which held mine in its grasp.

“ But ah, the joy was fleeting as a dream !
The sweetness passing brief ! A hand of iron

Was thrust between us two, and we were bid
To stand apart through all the years of life.
Vain were it to resist. Immutable
As Heav'n's decrees the law that severed us ;
Inflexible as Fate's the cruel hand
That held us far apart. And then we knew
The flow'ry banks whereon so happily
We wandered, hand in hand, spread fair above
A deep defile, bristling with many a rock,
Jagged and sharply cut, o'er which we scarce
Had 'scaped a fatal plunge. The iron hand
From this had saved us, true ! but ah, too late
Twas interposed our stricken hearts to spare
Deep, agonizing pain, and sharp despair.

“ Regret, and struggle, grief, and longing sore
The pleasant walk had brought us. To a dirge
Had turned the song of triumph in my heart,
As once again that master-hand the chords—
All trembling now, and vibrant with regret—
Pressed with magnetic fingers, ling'ring long
O'er the *finale* of our hymn to love,
Whose sadness wrung hot, bitter tears from eyes

Which late had danced with smiles. Brief was the
joy ;

The rapture and the sweetness brief ! But long
The pain and strife that followed ! For my heart
Was warm, and strong ; I could not love, as some,
With brief and fleeting passion—then forget.
Too deeply had affection's seal been set.

“ Apart we stood, and on each other gazed ;
And longed to clasp each one the other's hand ;
Longed for one fond caress ; longed for one hour
Of sweet companionship, when we should be
Each to the other all ; and, longing, were
Denied the simplest boons of happy love,
Given with such lavish hands to other hearts.
So looked, and longed, and so were still denied.
The iron hand held us back, and impotent
And vain were all our strivings for release
From that stern grasp which had destroyed our peace.

“ And then rebellion woke within the heart
Late tuned to softest music, and with tone
Of bitterness, and pain, it questioned Life
Why this thing should be so : why thus to me

Should but be giv'n the bitter drops of love,
While on my peers a whole rich, luscious draught
Of sweetness was bestowed, that they might quaff
At will.—God's goodness questioned, and His love.
His justice seemed partiality, misnamed.
I recognized His *right* to mould at will
The clay His hand had fashioned—but the *love*
That gave to one, all joy, another, woe,
I could not understand.

“ For ten long years
The struggle lasted. Oh, the deep unrest ;
The longings for oblivion ; for escape
From self, and the wild pain that made my life
A torture ! oh, the sighs wrung from my heart's
Profoundest deeps ; the bitter, burning tears
That damped my pillow many a weary night
Of that long decade which began so fair !
Then to my troubled heart a still small voice
Spoke peace ; so softly, stilly, it was long
Ere I was conscious of its whisper sweet ;
Long ere the surging waves of deep unrest
Were hushed to quietude and trustful calm ;
Long ere the problem that so vexed my soul
Was solved, and I could understand at last

The ministry of pain ; the tender love
That sometimes doth withhold ; that chastens sore
The fav'rite child, whose faulty character
'Twould mould to perfectness and symmetry,
Developing, through prunings sharp, severe,
The latent strength and force, the lurking grace
Of the erst-while encumbered character ;
Could understand that *life*, which seems so vain—
In all its many threads so tangled—full
Of problems hard to state, or solve, or prove—
Is but a school-time for the human soul,
In which to fit for God's full life of love,
In God's Eternal City, our blest home ;
The tasks He sets us, only such as He,
The Teacher, in His wisdom, and His love,
Doth see shall best prepare us for that life,
And for the work He hath for us to do,
While we're life's higher classes passing through.

“ And so I ceased to long for bliss withheld ;
Was satisfied to do the tasks He set ;
To wait, if such His will, till from His hand
I should receive the joy and happiness
By many gathered here. Could look upon

'Love's deep red roses' blooming sweet and fair
By many a 'garden wall,' and pass them by
With careless smiles, not envying at all
The beauty that my life had missed. I said :
God's love is best, and His dear love is mine.
If while some grasp, I ever must 'resign,'
And I drink 'rue,' while others quaff life's 'wine,'
He makes 'the balance good.' His love is best.
And so He gave me peace, and trust, and rest,
And I was happy, although still unblest
By human life's best human love. *Content*,
That peerless, white-winged dove, had fluttered down
And nestled in my heart. My pulses throbbed
With cool and even beat. No thrill of joy
Or woe, disturbed the quiet of my breast,
My spirit's deep, calm peace. How sweet to me
This perfect rest, one only who has sailed
Over such troubled waters as my course
Had been, and found at last a haven smooth
As mine, could understand.—So sweet it was,
E'en for the bliss for years desired in vain,
To have it broken I had shrunk with pain.

" *Ad interim*, I found my work, which was

To me a priceless boon. It filled my thought,
Inspired my mind, and, in some sense at least
It satisfied my heart. There was a strong,
Exhilarating pleasure in the power
Of thus creating, at my will, the souls
Which grew beneath my pen ; in wand'ring through
The realms of fancy, and of imagery,
In search of thoughts, and feelings, and desires,
And sensibilities with which t' endow
The people of my sweet, imagined world.
I worked for love of work—*this* work, which was
To me in every way congenial ; and
I won success ;—if not so great as I
Sometimes had dreamed of, still, as great, perhaps,
As I had reason to expect. I'd been
An eager reader ever ; now I read
As constantly, but with a purpose. So
I dwelt now in the intellectual,
While the emotional—in me so strong—
Slept quietly, and seldom woke for long.

“So nearly half a decade more flew by ;
And still the sweet white dove, *Content*, abode
Within my quiet heart. I still passed by

My neighbor's gardens, bright with roses red,
Without one envious thought ; till, on a day
Of sunny brilliance, one whose hands were filled
With dewy blossoms, pausing by my side
Until the fragrance of her scarlet flowers
Was wafted to my senses, with a pang
Of longing like to that of years gone by,
I prayed—' O, God, bless *me* with human love—
Yet not my will, but Thine be done !' I prayed,
And straightway did the prayer forget. The pang
Of longing and regret had passed. Content
Still tarried in my heart."

I paused, and leaned
My cheek upon my hand, and for a space
"Let silence drop between us. Constance' face
Was laid upon my knee—her eyes, upturned,
And resting eagerly upon my own,
Were dim with unshed tears ; her arms still clasped
My waist, with pressure fond ; and well I saw
She had forgotten, in her int'rest deep
In what I had related, all the pain
Which so had torn her in the earlier night.
She had not spoken once ; but oft her lips
Turned to my hand she'd drawn beneath her cheek,

In sympathy most delicate and sweet.
But now she said : " Dear, it was true, indeed,
As you were saying but a week ago,
That you have been upon the mountain top,
And from its outlook seen the heavenly hills.
I do not wonder that you felt, dear, then,
That it was good to suffer, such deep things
So perfectly and sweetly to have learned.
God must have loved you well, so to have taught
Your heart from out His own grand, perfect thought."

I started. " Is He teaching you ? " I asked.
" You've stepped beyond me in the thought you
gave

Just now—which never hitherto has come
And spoken to my soul. There's much in it
Which I would ponder later. 'Tis a thought
I thank you, dear, for bringing, and our God
For having sent it by your lips."

I bent

And kissed her softly ere she made reply :
" I'm glad if *any* word that I could say,
Or from my heart, or sent from God by me,
Can compensate, e'en in the least degree,

For all the wealth of sympathy and love
Which you have shown to me. But this content—
So sweet, so dearly bought, so prized by you—
Ah, could you lose it, darling ? ”

“ Yes, ah yes ! ”

I answered. “ Nearly half a decade long,
As I have said, within my quiet heart
It tarried sweetly, filling it with peace—
Such peace as it had never known before,
Nor may, I fear, again.

“ And then there came

One whose poetic spirit, touched with fire,
Was finely strung to harmonize with mine.
In pleasant converse many an hour was passed ;
With friendly grasp his warm, firm hand met
mine ;

And sympathy of aim, and taste, and hope,
Sealed us congenial friends.

“ And still my heart

Beat quiet in my bosom ! still no thrill
Of pain or rapture stirred my tranquil pulse,
The which I fancied now had grown so calm,
No hand—save one—could stir it to new life,
Or waken in my heart the old sweet strife.

“And so we joyed in friendly intercourse
At which none cavilled. Talked of books, and art ;
Of life—its triumphs, failures, duties, joys ;
The Christian’s hope and work ; æsthetics too,
And metaphysics oft ; the day’s affairs,
And all the topics open to such friends.
And still my heart lay quiet in my breast.
The calm was long, and deep, and restful, as
Should be a calm from such a tempest born—
But proved the precedent of coming storm.

“There came an hour when on my passive hand
His palm was laid, with new, magnetic touch.
Surprised, I felt my dormant pulse beat fast,
In quick response to that impassioned clasp.
Surprised, I saw in eyes down-drooped to mine,
A warmer light than friendship ever lends.
I marvelled, scarcely trusting what I read ;
And studied long his face to see how true
Was my surmise ; and tried my power well
Ere satisfied—ere I betrayed to him
How that one touch had stirred my quiet pulse.
But as the days flew on, and few passed by
But brought him for some moments to my side,

We came to understand each other well.
Indeed, it was not long ere we had learned
The sympathy between us was so fine,
It needed naught more fond than clasping hand
To demonstrate our hearts in beat kept time.
And so completely *en rapport* our souls,
Thought scarcely needed forms of speech, or words,
To make itself unto the other known.
And this was pleasanter than I can say.
For rarely, in this world of diverse powers,
Do we find spirits so attuned to ours.

“Although between us was such unreserve,
Such harmony, by either recognized,
We only dreamed of friendship. Friendship, true,
Idealized, and rarely found ; but still
A friendship that was possible. Meanwhile,
I studied him with pleasure that increased
With knowledge of his character and mind.
I found him cheerful ever ; witty ; kind,
And tender-hearted to a fault ; refined ;
And generous ; and delicate. A true
And manly gentleman. Not faultless, he,
Or else not human. But I saw o’er them

His virtues were predominant, and so
I gave his imperfections little thought.
Our circle was the same ; my friends were his ;
Our tastes were similar ; so we ne'er lacked
For subjects or of thought or pleasant speech.
He told me of his past—its trials, toils,
Its pleasures, triumphs, friends. Read with me oft,
And to me still more frequently, some brief
And pleasant poem which we each admired.
I worked, and he examined, criticised,
And oft approved and praised ; and now and then
He brought to me some trifle from his pen,
And I in turn the critic then became.
So each the other stimulated ; each
The other gave encouragement and aid ;
And all was harmony between us two.
No thought, no word, jarred on the pleasant hours
Which drew us close with all a magnet's powers.

“ One day stands out from all the rest—complete !
Marked by no great emotion, or event,
But only by a gladness, and content,
And rare, æsthetic pleasure, innocent
And sweet, as though no bar between us lay.

Almost a whole, long, peerless, perfect day ;
Wherein we learned, as ne'er we had before,
How strong and deep the subtle sympathy
Between our souls ; the harmony that marked
Our thoughts ; the strong, magnetic pow'r that bound
Our hearts together till they throbbed as one ;
How to our nature's finest fiber, we
Each other suited, as few ever could.
I think, while mem'ry lives in either heart,
That day will from her records ne'er depart.

“ One day ! and oh, how many, *many*, know
A lifetime filled with such !

“ I had not thought
Until he came, the whole world held a man
Who thus could play, at will, upon the chords
Of heart, and soul, and sense ; who thus could stir,
E'en to its lowest depths, a soul so long
Held in the quietude which mine had known
Until he came and touched it. It is said
' Hearts have their winter, and re-bloom in spring !'
So mine awoke from its long wintry sleep,
And leaped with pleasure to admit the guest
Who knocked so softly at its guardless door.

Awhile—then Conscience wakened too, and spoke
A warning to the flutt'ring, sentient thing ;
For he was bound ; and *love* to us was sin."

" *Oh!* well you said you'd trodden all the path
Which I have walked to-night !" cried Constance
then,

With quick, sharp accent of acutest pain.

" Ah, what know I of sorrow, or intense
And overwhelming grief ? "

" My love, I pray

You ne'er know more than that you know to-day.

Pain had not wakened yet, but did fall soon ;

Nor in it was the faintest gleam of hope—

For his were bonds that naught but death could break.

I had been skeptical of second love—

I had not thought that any who had known

A passion such as mine for him long lost,

Could ever love again ; could ever feel

That rich delirium of joy slow steal,

Deep thrilling, through the pulses, till the heart

Beat with responsive wildness ; could renew

Emotions that are known *e'en once* to few.

And, least of all, had I believed that I

Could ever prove its possibility
By personal experience ; or that
My heart held in reserve the power so
To care for any I should ever meet.
But I was doomed to prove the fallacy
Of all such unbeliefs. Nor was it long,
Strive as I might with all the sophistry
Which Satan lends to blind the human soul,
I could conceal the knowledge from my heart,
That I to him was passing dear—that he
Than any other was far more to me.

“ With knowledge, pain began ; and with the pain,
Began the strife I knew so well—so well !
Regrets, and questionings, and tears, and sighs,
Once conquered, now a giant foe and strong.
While sweet Content, so loved, so hardly won,
Soon spread her snowy wings and flew away ;
And dark Unrest filled up the vacant place
Wherein she brooded late. Deep, sore Unrest,
So hard to bear, howe’er familiar grown.
How gladly now I’d have retraced my steps
Along the way my feet so lately paced !
How gladly I’d have hushed my throbbing heart

To its late peace and rest ! It might not be !
Through its unguarded portals *he* had crept,
Nor would he be displaced. Too few its guests,
Too welcome and too honored he, to be
Thrust rudely out, although I owned the power.
But this I did not. He had won his throne,
Where henceforth he must reign, and he alone.

*“ When souls have touched, and hearts have beat in
time,
No pow’r of will can quench the sacred flame,
Or make the future as the past the same.*

“ So large the place the dove Content had filled,
It now gave room, not for Unrest alone,
But strong Regret, rebellious Questioning,
And envious Pain had all crept in as well.
Twice to have loved, I said, and twice in vain !
Twice to have felt a heart which to but few
Can e’er respond, stirred to its very deeps !
Twice to have looked at what would satisfy
Its every wish, and see it snatched away,
Leaving a longing and a want behind !
To look one moment into Paradise,

And have the gates shut in my very face !
Must it be *ever* thus, my whole life long ?
Could there be *naught* for me but to resign ?
Must I still drink life's rue, and must its wine
Be ever dashed, scarce tasted, from my lips,
And this by my own hand ? Oh, had I not
Suffered enough in those dark days of old,
And from the self-same cause, but I must tread
The wine-press once again ? What more — what
more

Of discipline like this did my sore heart—
Ere-while submissive, trustful, and content—
Have need of, that like this I must again
The suff'rings and the pangs of old endure ?
Was this God's answer to my prayer for love ?
And if 'twas so, how could it be a sin !
Or—was He trying me, to see if yet
I worthy had become of some great boon
Of love and happiness He held in store ?
I could not tell ! *He* only knew—or could.
But if the last, I felt, with bitter shame,
I had not stood the test. Aye, I had proved
Unworthy yet, when in the balance weighed
With sore temptation ; I was proven weak—

Weak still, for all the meed of strength I thought
The years to my oft chastened heart had brought."

"Weak because loving? Ah, how weak are all
Of womankind, if that be weakness, dear!"
Said Constance then.

"Not weak in loving—nay!
But weak in that I did not thrust away
The tempter earlier from my heart. To love
Was but the almost sure result of such
Association, frequent, close, and sweet,
As we for weeks had known. We should have seen
That in the end it nothing less could mean.

"*I* saw at last, but I was weak indeed,
And *could* not speak the words that should debar
My heart and life of what it ne'er before
Had in such measure known—a deep, and full
Companionship—and not alone of heart,
But mind and soul as well. I've heard it said:
'Not e'en the tend'rest heart, and next our own,
Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh.'
I know 'tis true; and yet, he often caught
Ere I could speak it, my unuttered thought;

.

And with my hand in his, I often felt
Our hearts were in communication, too,
And that direct. This was not sentiment,
But was a *feeling*, strong as that which made
Us conscious of the clasp of sentient palms.
I know not of psychology enough,
Or of æsthetics, to account for this
By any 'ism' of the present day.
I only know it was a feeling real,
I ne'er before had known, or shall again,
For never more will one so near my heart,
My inmost soul approach.

“So, as I said,

I *could* not speak the words that bade him come
No more, that shut him wholly from my life.
I oft resolved to do sô, ere he came,
But then it was so sweet to have him near ;
To *feel* the love that never passed his lips ;
To have his sympathy in all my work—
In all that pleased me—that the flesh proved weak
Though willing was the spirit. So still raged
The combat in my soul, both fierce and long,
Tempting and trying me almost beyond
My power to endure.”

“ And *he* looked on,
And saw unmoved, inactive, all this strife ?”
Inquired the girl.

“ No, not unmoved, I think,
Although he must have seen it—in degree,
And only thus ; for those few hours he spent
Beside me, were the brightest of my days.
Thus little of the conflict did he see,
Though strong and fierce it swelled. But through it
all

I prayed—‘ Oh, Christ, once tempted, leave me
not

In this my hour of darkness ! Be thou near
To me—to him—and keep us both from sin !’
For still I said—and felt—God’s love is best !
For that brings peace instead of wild unrest ;
And that gives promise of a joy to come,
When we shall all be gathered in His home.

“ God’s love *is* best ! but while the human heart
Beats with a human pulse, it must cry out,
At times, for human love to satisfy
The human craving, and the human need.
So, though I clung to God’s sustaining hand

All through that time of struggle and of pain,
My human heart cried hungrily for love—
His love, that waited just beneath my hand,
Full, perfect, satisfying each demand.

“So came temptation in seductive guise !
And came with greater force, I knew full well,
To me, than him ; for I was more alone,
And needed more the love that he could give.
His life was full already—mine was bare
And empty of the grace that to the heart
Of woman is so sweet ; which none beside,
How good soe’er, can perfectly supply.
But not in this alone temptation lay :
To be in all my many changing moods
So fully understood ; to know myself
Appreciated, and by one so kind ;
To feel that he could sympathize in all
The thoughts, pursuits, and pleasures of my days ;
To see, where’er we met, his first glad smile,
His warmest greeting was for me—his last
Farewell of look, or word, or gesture, mine,
Was very pleasant to my lonely heart.
And so awhile I hugged the sweetness close—

Mixed though it was with pain in every part—
Nor thrust away the tempter from my heart.

“But not for long. For Conscience, as I said,
Awoke from slumber brief, and warning words
Soft whispered to my swiftly throbbing heart.
Conscience, and one who brought from heav’n direct,
It seemed to us, a message to our souls.
We sat one night within the house of God—
Apart, yet ever conscious, in our hearts,
I of his presence, doubtless he of mine—
And lent a list’ning ear to one who swayed
At will, the souls of those who heard him speak.
I could not tell you of his theme one word,
Until, with somewhat of irrelevance,
He, leaning forward, said with earnestness :
‘There may be those before me at this hour,
Still serving God, though in temptation’s toils ;
Temptations made more powerful and strong
By inclination, sympathy, and taste,
Or force of olden habit, which revives
At times, and proves itself unconquered still.
If such there be, ’twere well they understand
Temptation is a flow’r, which on the edge

Of frightful gorges, deep and steep, doth bloom.
They may, perchance, the flower stoop and pluck,
And still regain their footing, firm and strong.
’Tis but one chance in many ; for too oft
They lose their balance, and are hurled down, down,
Through frightful space—to darkest depths of hell.
The last word, uttered in a whisper deep,
Fell on a breathless silence. And although
I recollect I thought it, even then,
Unto his subject quite irrelevant,
And fancied it a sentiment he thought
So fine and sweet he wished to give it air,
And so he introduced it thus and there,
It notwithstanding had fulfilled its part,
And sunk, with aim unerring, in my heart.

“The service ended. Mingling with the throng,
I slowly paced adown the aisle, and stood
For one brief moment, hand to hand with him ;
While we, who in these days had learned to read
So well the other’s face, saw graved on each
A trouble vague and grave, and knew the shaft
At random sent, had pierced the heart of both.
He told me later, that the night to him

Was one of deep unrest ; that sleep forsook
His pillow, nor would be recalled until
The dawn broke softly o'er the eastern hills.

“The day that followed brought him to my side
As had become his wont ; but there had grown
Between us a restraint before unknown,
Which either felt, whose cause by each was guessed.
But not for long could such a feeling rest
Between us two, while each could read so well
The other's heart, and feel each thought-wave swell,
Until it broke upon the shore of speech.
I cannot tell or through my lips or his
The thought first broke. I only know we looked
Within each other's eyes, and knew, at last,
Our boasted friendship had become a thing
Belonging to the past ; that love had come,
Soft floating on the waves of sympathy,
And lay high stranded on our throbbing hearts.
The tide that bore it hither still might surge,
And beat, and rush, and break in foamy surf,
And flow or ebb at will ; it could not lift
The stranded love, and bear it to the sea,
And leave us as before, serene, and free.

“The love had come unwooded ; with sails all set ;
The wave had lifted it, and tossed it high,
Beyond the utmost reach of coming tides ;
What should we do with it—this love ! we two—
One bound with thongs no struggles e’er could break,
The other pow’rless too this love to take
And thrust it backward on the tide’s strong arms.
It lay there, cradled softly on our hearts ;
’Twas perfect and complete in every part ;
’Twas fanned by breezes sweet ; ’twas passing fair ;
Unwished, unsought it came—oh, why not we
Together launch it and set sail therein—
To unknown seas ? nay ! nay ! along the shore—
Scarce out of sight—a little way—no more—
Could there be harm while we were still in view
Of all who chose to look ? what though we grasp
A few sweet hours, and rock together thus
In love’s frail boat upon a summer tide !
Ah, where in this could danger lurk or bide ?

“So to each other spoke our thought—not giv’n
To words, but uttered only through the strong
And subtle pow’r which lay in sympathy
So fine, our hearts became to each their own

Complete interpreter ; which, speaking through
The eyes that met with no reserve of glance
And through the clasped and thrilling palms, by each,
Was heard responsive.

“ But no word that trenched
On this, from lips of his or mine brake forth—
Save once, when for his splendid self-control
Became the moment's power far too great,
And from his lips the quick confession broke,
That I was dearly loved.—This later. Now
We spoke with frankness, as had been our wont,
Of what we each had listened yester-eve,
And what the force with which it came to us.
Our eyes were fairly opened, and we saw
We were on dang'rous ground. We did not fear
To lose our foothold on the solid rock,
And be precipitated to unknown
And fatal depths of sin—we knew ourselves,
And knew each other far too well—our trust
In God was too abiding, and too deep,
To fear the fate the preacher had foretold.
We both were Christians ; we could not commit
So great a wrong, and sin against our God.
So not in that to us the danger lay :

But dally'ng with temptation, as of late,
We might brush from our Christian purity,
The rich, soft delicacy of its bloom ;
And there was danger also that we two
Should come to love each other far too well,
And so destroy the peace of mind of both.
Of this we spoke with frankness, as I said ;
But either knew the danger had been dared,
And that the work was done. *He* thought, perhaps,
'Twas not too late these last days to redeem,
And make this love a moment's blissful dream,
Which soon, now we had wakened, would by each
Forgotten be, and all be as of old.
It might—to *him*—it *never* could to me !
And this I *knew*, as by his side I sat,
And calmly said : ' Yes, it is right, and best,
We meet no more as lately we have done,
On terms that draw us closer, heart to heart,
With every passing day. Perhaps too long
Already, we have dallied with the charm
Each for the other has, born of the deep
And perfect harmony between our souls.
Perhaps too close, by sympathy impelled,
Our hearts have come—so close indeed they speak

Each to the other without use of words.
And so we'll meet no more, save, as of old,
When chance together brings us. I shall miss
Your daily visits, and the interchange
Of thought and speech upon the interests
Which fill my days ; but can submit, though loth,
To what I know is right and best for both.'

“This I could *say* with calmness, as I sat,
My hand in his, his eyes upon my face ;
But well I knew the pain with which the days
To come would be endowed—to me, at least,
However it might be with him. Indeed,
I knew for him 'twould be less hard than me,
To put in force these words, and to give up
Each other wholly, as we felt we must.
And yet, I think he found it hard, as well,
Me to resign, who had of late, I knew,
To him grown passing precious. But he held
Deep in his nature great reserve of strength,
When cause for its exertion was revealed,
Or action had become imperative.
Ease-loving, fond of drifting with the tide,
As well I knew he was ; and shrinking, too,

From what would be unpleasant, or to him
Or others whom he loved, as I had found
So many times he did ; yet when there came
A strong necessity for action, he
Proved equal to the need, and, standing firm,
Revealed the latent strength few would have guessed
His pleasant nature held.

“So was it now :

Eyes dim with unshed tears, as oft before
I'd seen them under stress of feeling strong ;
Lips tremulous with pain he could not hide ;
Hands holding mine in pressure hard and warm,
All told how stern the ordeal was to him,
Which bade him yield the glad companionship
With one congenial as but few could be.
And yet, he to the right could still stand firm.
For this I honored him ; for this I loved
More fondly still the man who thus had proved
He worthy was of such deep love as mine.
And so we parted ! often still to meet,
But rarely now as we of late had done ;
And when we did, the pain exceeded far
The meed of pleasure which the hour could yield.
I saw him from my window daily still ;

His greeting ever was a smile most fond ;
But what was this but torture to the heart
Lone, sad, and sorrowful—from him apart ! ”

Again I paused. Back pressed those bitter days
Upon my heart, with all the force of pain
Which through them had been trailed from end to end.
And, cov’ring with my hand my burning eyes,
Leaned back, forgetful for the time of all
But that deep misery I then had known,
And which still stretches through the present time,
On reaching to the future. Deep and hard
It throbbed along my tortured pulses now,
As I recalled the agony that filled
Each moment of those long, slow-dragging days,
And restless, sleepless hours of troubled nights,
Not blacker than the fate that wraps me ’round,
And seems all coming time to darkly bound. .

I had, I say, forgotten all but this ;
And started when a soft, and ling’ring kiss
Fell on my mouth from lips divinely sweet ;
While round my neck a tender arm was clasped ;
And on my ear a sobbing sigh breathed soft,

In sympathy I had not known so oft
As to have rendered valueless its gift,
Or tiresome its expression.

“Darling, oh

Why do I let you tell me this, that so
Brings back to you the fearful suffering
Of that sad time ! Dear, tell me now no more,
So sorrowful it makes your heart, and sore.”

Thus Constance murmured through her trembling
lips ;

But I returned—with one long, heavy sigh,
From the recurring anguish of those days
Breaking away—“ Yes, it has brought it all
With freshness to me, as so oft before ;
But used to that long since I have become,
For seldom in my heart is mem’ry dumb.
And I have now but little more to tell.

Upon the mis’ry of that bitter time
I will not dwell ; for I in words could ne’er
Convey to you a realizing sense
Of how intensely deep and drear it was.
For, as you may suppose, a parting such
As ours had been, and separation, too,

So closely foll'wing on the pleasant hours
We late had known, had but increased the love
Each for the other felt—increased the strife
Of pain and passion for the mastery
O'er conscience, and my faith and trust in God,
Contending in my breast.

“I could not tell
One half the elements that entered in
To that sore struggle. Shame, that when exposed
To fierce temptation's flames, I through them had
Not passed without the smell of fire upon
My garments left ; regret I had let slip,
For those few days of sweet companionship,
The hard-won peace, content, and trust, from years
Of pain and sorrow wrested ; and a sense
Of having lost th' approving smile of God—
Of having dropped my hold upon the Hand
Whose guidance and support I long had known,
And had been *glad* in all my ways to own.

“This first, and last ; and running thick through
this—

As runs an undertone of sadness through
Some splendid harmony of chorded sounds—

A moan of madness, or a wail of pain
Through proudest pæans swelling, low, yet strong—
Rebellion ; and impatience ; and despair ;
And longing deep and constant ; anger, too ;
And never-ceasing, ever-throbbing pain.

Rebellion that again I must wade through
A stream whose waters are so dark and deep ;
That I must pace again, with bleeding feet,
A path I had already trodden bare ;
That when I was at peace, and was content,
And resting, trustful, in the love of God,
Should come temptations so insidious, strong,
In guise so sweet, and so beguiling too,
My weak heart could not bear them, or o'ercome ;
That others should be giv'n such wealth of love,
And all I had from me be taken—*all !*

Bare, poor, and empty leaving all my life.
Impatience of the pain long years ago
Familiar grown—which then I bore so well,
And now so rasped me with its fretting swell,
I could no patience with it feel, nor try
To hush its wailings on the breast of God,
Who once had soothed me sweetly, when beneath
The chast'ning rod I had grown faint with pain.

And deep *despair* of all the coming time !
So well I knew the fierce tenacity
With which my constant heart would cling to those
Who once have passed its portals, ever closed
Save to the few who have its pass-word learned ;
So well I knew that naught save years of time—
From whose intensity of suffering
My sore heart shrank—could free me from the bonds
Of this great love which had unbidden come—
Of this great pain which was its fruit and sum.
And never silent *longing* for the press
Of fingers whose magnetic touch had drawn
My heart from out my keeping into his ;
For hours of such companionship, so full,
And dear, and sweet as we had sometime known ;
For all his love—yea, *all* ! and all his life,
To round, and to perfect, and fill my own ;
I *coveted* the man whose nature seemed
The complement of mine ; for well I knew
The world no other held unto whose heart
Mine could respond, as his. It was to me
Most aggravating, bitter, *hard*, to see
All that my heart had e'er desired, or asked,
Before it spread so temptingly and full,

Which yet it was forbidd'n to grasp, or e'en
To covet for its own ; to know the love
As sweet, and pure, and true as hers who wore
Upon her finger a betrothal ring,
Was, by one act of his, sealed years before,
To me a sin and a disgrace become ;
She was congratulated—and I shamed ;
And yet my love was good, and great, and strong,
In kind, degree, and measure, as was hers.
At times the madness of deep *anger* surged
In wild, strong waves within my troubled breast ;
First at myself, that I was powerless
To tear this fierce, tormenting passion out,
Though with it came my heart. Aye, I'd been *glad*
To know that I should feel it ne'er again
With *any* thrill of deep affection stir.
Why should I cherish love in any form,
Since 'twas a torment and a pain alone—
At least the loves which I had won or known !—
Anger with him, that when he knew me calm,
Contented, peaceful, he should so have come
And broken softly in my guardless heart.
This seldom ; he had been so gen'rous, kind,
So true and tender to me, not for long

Could I feel aught of anger toward him.
Sometimes, I fear my wrath beat, impotent,
Against the heart of God, who thus could send,
Or could permit such suff'ring as I bore.
But this I knew was Satan's whisper low,
And soon I ceased to listen to its flow.
With all the rest, the sharpest, fiercest pangs
Of jealousy a human heart can know,
Whose torture was more deep than words can show.

“So raged the conflict in my heart, made up
Of many elements, and stirring to
Its utmost deeps, each passion that had lain
So long untouched and quiet there. Indeed,
I had not dreamed so much of sin, of deep
Deceptive wickedness still lingered in
The heart which had, by sternest discipline,
Been chastened o'er and o'er ; I had not thought
My faith could stagger and grow pale beneath
The force of any blow which could be dealt
By pain or by temptation. I had thought
'Twas grappled firmly ; that no storms could lift
• Or drag it, leaving my poor bark to drift
Thus helplessly at mercy of the storm.

But these dark days had taught me many things
That tore and tortured with their venom'd stings.

“So beat my spirit's drooping, broken wings
Against the love, which lifted up its head
In scorn of all the poor weak strokes which they
Had pow'r to give ; and stronger grew each day,
For all my struggles, its tormenting sway.

“Some sorrows have their compensations ; this—
Oh, God ! this *none* could offer to my heart.
It had no sweetness ; balm ; no meed of joy ;
No promise for the future ; *naught* which could
Give recompense, though slight, for all the wild
And turbid agony that tore my heart,
And left it stinging with a constant smart.

“Hope, courage, youth, ambition—all were dead !
Were ? ah, they are ! I have no hope in life ;
No courage to endure the years to come ;
And no ambition for the work I loved.
All, all are dead. All stricken from my heart
By this unfortunate and wretched love.
The future is a rayless, cheerless blank ;

The past a blotted record full of pain ;
The present one long strife of sharp regret,
Of longing, and of grief. How dark before
The years stretch outward ! off'ring to my view
Not one sweet promise of a brighter day,
To comfort give, or be my spirit's stay.
Oh, God ! oh, God ! 'tis more than I can bear !"
And, in the madness of my deep despair,
Ignoring her who still knelt at my side,
Whose hands still clasped me, on the window seat
I threw my arms, and bent my throbbing head,
While dry, hard sobs broke from my aching heart,
And from the lips in anguish rent apart.

And Constance, terror-stricken at the grief—
Or at its deep expression—which she saw,
Sobbed bitterly in sympathy, and held
Me closer for a moment—then arose
And paced the floor in deep bewilderment—
Then back again, and by my side she knelt
As just before, and murmured through pale lips :
“ My dear, dear friend ! what *can* I say, what do,
To compensate, or to atone to you
For having thus persuaded you to give

The story, which recalls so terribly
The suff'ring of the past, until it swells
And tears you with such present agony !
Believe me, dear, I knew not what I asked !
That such deep pain I'd not have caused your heart
For all the riches of the world. Forgive—
Forgive ! To think I had presumed to feel
My sympathy could ease or soothe the grief
Whose measure I had truly never guessed,
Or for its story I had never pressed.
I did not know—I did not know—forgive !
To suffer thus ! oh God, what must it be !
How little sorrow e'er has come to me !
How little do I know of grief like this,
So bitter, and so deep ! ”

She wrung her hands

In fright and in distress ; and I thrust back
The passion of despair and agony
Upon the heart from which it had its way
So fiercely torn, to break in sobs and sighs.
When I could speak, I said : “ You now will see
Why I so shrank from telling you the tale
Of my distressful past, when few days since
You asked me ; for full well I knew that you

Knew not enough of life, or its intense
And aggravated woes, to understand
My story, or my pain. I've told you now,
And you have seen what words like 'pain' and 'grief,'
And 'sorrow,' often lightly used, may mean
To one who's learned them all by heart.
Is it not true?"

“True? yes! I've learned to-night
More things than one. I never can forget
What you have told me—what I've seen—what felt—
Or all the love you've shown to me to-night
In ways so many. But I shall regret
Forever, causing you to feel again
Such bitter pain, by having pressed you thus
To tell me what I had no right to ask,
And had not, had I guessed what it would be
To you, to grant my wish.”

“No—you reproach
Yourself unjustly, Constance,” I replied.
“You did not press me, nor, unless I chose
To do so, was I forced to thus relate
The trials I have borne. Another time
I doubtless had refused you; but to-night
The past is very present to my heart,

And from the heart's abundance speak the lips.
I've told you now the whole, or nearly all,
And from to-night we'll speak of it no more.
But little now remains."

"No, tell me not
The rest—it is too much. I will not ask
That you should say another word of what
So pains you," cried the girl.

"I'll tell the rest—
'Tis little more," I said. "And then we'll try
To snatch a brief repose ere breaks the morn,
And all the sounds of busy life begin.
A month, or more, or less, passed by, in which
We seldom met save in a throng, or where
No words except of matters commonplace
Could pass between us ; while the love that came
Unbidden, and so vainly, reared its head
Still insolently, and retained its sway
With strong persistency o'er either heart.
My struggles all were impotent to break
The bonds which seemed of silk, and were of iron ;
Whose rivets stronger grew with each attempt
To force, or burst them. *He* too, well I knew,
Was trying daily from my place within

His heart, to thrust me out ; to teach himself
Forgetfulness of one who had approached
Too near the inmost chambers of his soul,
To be so banished—for I also knew
His efforts were in vain ; that no less deep
The love he bore me was, than when each day
He came to give me kindly words, and tell
In eyes, and tones, and hand-clasp warm, and all
The ways in which love eloquently shows
Its power and presence, that he loved me well.—
Knew he was powerless to break the spell
Which those few hours of close companionship
Had o'er us cast, and tear me from his heart.
But what to me was agony, to him
Seemed to possess sufficient sweetness still,
To compensate for all the pain it gave.
Or so I judged. Of course I could not tell
How mightily the pain might rise, and swell
When there was none to see. I saw him now
So rarely, that I could not read his heart
As I had done ere-while, or understand
The forces working 'neath the manner bland,
With which to most he masked his feeling's play.
But I was sure the love held rigid sway

O'er him as me. I read it in his eye,
And in his deep-flushed cheek, and softened tone,
Whene'er—where'er we met. There were, beside,
A thousand trifles one cannot describe,
A thousand little acts, and words, and tones,
Which plainly told his heart was still my own.

“So passed some time ; and then—he went away.
I knew 'twas best—I said that I was glad.
Felt I could better so the battle fight
With this fierce love, so dominant and strong ;
That better was my chance of making sure
The conquest which I felt I *must* obtain,
If life henceforth were not to be all vain ;
That *only* so could I the vict'ry gain.
But oh ! 'twas hard to have him go—to know
Day after day must pass without one sight
Of him who was so dear—*so dear !* to pine,
And sigh, and long for one hand-clasp ; one sound
Of that soft, pleasant voice, to me so sweet ;
One glance from those dear eyes I loved to meet.

“He came to say farewell ; we were alone ;
Reserve was banished ; in the deep-moved tone

With which he spoke of what it was to him—
This separation ; in the eyes all dim
With tears unshed, with which around the room
Where we had passed so many pleasant hours,
He glanced at times, then back upon my face ;
In lips that trembled visibly, whene'er
We spoke of how each other we should miss ;
In hands that held my own in passion's clasp,
I read and felt the love I long had known,
Which in that hour strong and unchanged was shown.
If I had ever doubted—ever felt
It had grown less—e'er thought I was deceived,
And that he loved me not, I doubted now
No longer ; never had it swelled so strong,
Or spoken to me plainer than that day.
I had been blind indeed—distrustful e'en
To folly, had I doubted then the love
Betrayed in every accent, every line
Of that dear, tender face I knew so well.
This was our real parting, though 'twas not
Our last farewell ; for that was made when 'round
Us others stood, to whom he said good-bye,
Though gravely, with some pleasant word for each ;
Then, last, to me he came, took both my hands,

Held them one moment close, looked in my eyes,
And having spoken not one farewell word,
He turned away, and went. Ah, had he gone
Three brief months earlier, all this bitter pain,
And deep, sad struggle had been spared my heart ;
And I had kept my peace, and my content,
My trust, and hope, and courage, now all spent !”

“And you’ve not seen him since ?” she asked.

“Not since.

’Twas but three months ago, and two I’ve spent
Among these mountains. In my home, so strong
Associations were that spoke of him,
I could not bear them longer ; so I came
To seek for peace, and for forgetfulness,
Amid the deep wild woods, and daisied hills
Of this sweet country side. I’ve sought in vain,
As you have seen. A very present pain
This wretched love is still. The deep desire
For him, his presence, love, is still as strong,
And constant, as the day in which I looked
This hopeless passion in the face, and knew
My peace was gone for aye. I think I’ve shown
I did not then sit down, and tamely yield

Submission to the thralldom I had dared,
But fought against it with my nature's might ;
And still am fighting, though without result,
Save to increase the strength of bonds that fret.
But oh, how weary grow I of the strife ;
The questionings of thought and of desire ;
The sorrow and the longing never still ;
Of puzzling o'er the problem, complex, deep,
Why this has been, and what the mission is
Of this temptation and this bitter pain—
To me so useless seeming, and so vain—
Till heart and brain are weary of the strain.”

“I read to-day,” said Constance, “just to-day—
Or rather yesterday—a thought like this :
‘Temptation may be sent to lead us on
To greater heights of knowledge, or to depths
Profounder of experience, than we
Perchance had known before.’ It seemed to me,
As thus I read, a good and perfect thought ;
And so I kept it ; so I give it you.
Perhaps these months of pain may lead at last
To greater heights than you have yet attained,
And then you will not feel it all in vain.

Although the compensation *must* be great,
Which could make up for even one such hour
As you have known to-night."

"It must—'tis true.

I doubt not there is purpose in it, too—
This anguish and temptation I have known ;
That it was needed or it were not sent.
I know I have myself to blame in much ;
That I was weak, and wrong ; I know I sinned,
And so deserve to suffer—as I have,
God knows ! if suffering can e'er atone
For sin, mine surely must, for greater far
The pain than the transgression. I believe,
However, the temptation came from God,
To further discipline the heart He saw
Some chast'ning needed still ; so much there was
Outside of will, or of desire of ours
To draw us close ; and so peculiar, too,
The circumstances neither could control,
And which combined to *aid*, at least, in what
Became results so painful—all to me
Seemed showing 'twas, if not ordained of God,
At least by Him permitted—as I said,
No doubt with purpose wise and good, although

Short-sighted as I am, and blinded, too,
The pain and anguish by, which it has brought,
I fail to see its mission, or its power
To make me better—to increase the faith
Which stronger seemed ere this dark trial came
To test and prove it, surely, than 'tis now,
Or may, I fear, become again for long.
If he had gone away short space before !
Had it not been for this ! and this ! and this !
My heart had slumbered still, and so had kept
The peace, and happiness, and sweet content
Which it had gained from many troubled years,
And only won with sighs, and cries, and tears.
It is this thought—that God permits the pain
That seems to me so needless ; that He sent
The great temptation which has robbed my life
Of all its trust and peace, which makes, at times,
Rebellion surge so wildly in my breast ;
Which keeps me from His arms, where once I found
Such perfect rest and comfort clasp me 'round.

“It is so bitter to be shown a good
' You had not sought, and had been quite content
Not to have seen, and yet to be denied

Its full possession, when it comes to have
At last a priceless value to your heart !
It may be years ere I regain the place
I just had reached ere this temptation came
And thrust me from it. Do you wonder, then,
I fail to see its use or its intent ?
I daily sought God's guidance, and His care,
And in it trusted. I believe so sought
It never is withheld. Yet, guarded thus,
The Tempter reached me still. Can I then doubt
God, whom I trusted, gave me to his toils ?
And thus believing, is it wonderful
If in my pain I sometimes *do* rebel
That I must suffer thus, perhaps for years,
And only gain at last upon the path
Which upward leads to the Celestial Hills,
An altitude I had attained before ?
If, feeling thus, I find it difficult
To lean upon the love I trusted once,
And still believe He doeth all things well ?
I *do* believe it—still ! I *know* 'tis true !
But oh, it's hard—*so* hard, to *feel* it too.
Indeed, I better could endure it all,
Were I not conscious I had strayed away

In such degree from Him who claims my faith ;
Could I still feel that trust in His dear love,
And in His tender guidance, wheresoe'er
My steps might lead, which once to me was sweet,
And kept me, hopeful, gladsome, at His feet.
But this I've lost ; and as I've said before,
While doubting not His power to restore—
Or e'en His will—my erring, doubting heart,
My strength seems still too small to do its part."

"Dear, many times I've heard you say 'tis
those—

And only those—whom He, the Father, loves,
That He doth chasten. And I've read, as well,
That every branch of His that *beareth fruit*,
He *purgeth* that it be *more fruitful still*.
When all the pain and strife is quelled at last—
If that *can* be—I have no doubt the fruit
You'll bring as fragrant offering to Him,
Will be the richer for the discipline
You find so bitter now. This I've been taught
By you, dear, o'er and o'er in these few weeks
I've had the joy to know you. Now I give
The teaching back, with all the comfort sweet

It has the power to yield."

So Constance said ;
And I replied : " Thanks ! It is true—the whole !
It *should* give comfort to me—and it does ;
For God, I know, is better than my thought ;
And 'tis my sinfulness and doubt alone,
Not lack of love in Him, which keeps me thus,
A willful and rebellious child, away
From all the tender soothing I so need,
And that He waits to give. I'll try, myself,
To learn the lesson which you say I've taught
To you repeatedly ; which you have brought
So sweetly as an offering to me,
To comfort in my hour of need.

" But see !

The coming Dawn is clasping 'round the east
A silver belt, and morn will soon be here.
Go rest, at least, ere day resumes its sway,
Though Sleep refuse your bidding to obey,
And bring to you forgetfulness, if brief,
Of this sad night and all its store of grief."

" And you—will you rest also ?" asked the girl.

“Yes, I’ll rest too. When wearied, spent with pain,
Comes partial numbness to me for a time,
And I lie passive in the arms of Grief,
Scarce conscious of her touch, or presence near.
Then go. Good-night ! Good morning too !” I bent,
And clasped, and softly kissed her.

So she went !



II.

“O grief beyond all other griefs, when fate
First leaves the young heart lone and desolate !”



“God’s dealings still are love ; His chast’nings are alone
Love now compelled to take an altered, sterner tone.”



THE days flit fleetly, and the summer bright
Lies faint and languishing within the arms
Of gay-robed Autumn. Through the forest greens
Has rippled one night’s frost wave, leaving there
Such splendid dashes of deep, glowing red,
Of mellow amber, gold, and soft-toned bronze,
It fills the eye with satisfaction deep

To gaze upon the harmony of hue
Born of the blended contrasts, which the frost
Has hung all through the forest glooms, and laid
Upon the sides and summits of the hills.
A soft blue haze rests, tremulous, above
The distant valley reaches, softening
And toning too the outlines bold and strong
Of the high-sweeping mounts. The atmosphere,
Steeped in the fragrance which the flowers exhale
In dying 'neath the cold kiss of the frost,
And drunken with the odor of ripe grapes,
Pulsates with slumbrous passion. Cloudlets gray,
Or fleecy white, and soft as rolls of down,
Float in the ambience of the upper space,
Or, higher, rest upon the skies' blue breast.
And in the gardens sheltered from the frost,
The scarlet sage its brilliant tassels flaunts;
And many-hued chrysanthemums; and frail,
Yet hardy morning-glories; and the pink,
And white, and purple asters, delicate
Yet bright in tints; and all the gay array
Of Autumn beauties, bravely do their best
To decorate their mother Earth's kind breast.

September, bright, sweet month, which ushers in
The new-crowned queen of this half-rounded year,
In all her gracious loveliness is here !

With breath yet warm from Summer's glowing fires
And fragrant with its ripened fruitage lush,
She fans sweet Nature's cheek, and smiles to see
How flushed and fair it grows beneath her breath;
And with her cool hand dipped in wintry snows,
She wreathes bright garlands for the Autumn Queen,
And lays them softly on her royal brow ;
Withdraws a space to see how fair they look,
Then weaves a garment of the same bright hues,
And glad, yet reverent, on tip-toe stands,
And robes her in it with her own cool hands.

September ! slumbrous-eyed, and dreamy-faced,
And soft-lipped, sweet September ! Of the fair
Twelve daughters of the mother year, the most
Bewitching, versatile, and lovely ! Bright,
Yet soft ; sublime, yet sweet ; gay, with a hint
Of sadness in her cheeriness, which tints
Her face with deeper beauty ; chaste, and yet
Impassioned ; fragrant-breathed, and tender-toned ;

Warm-hearted, and cool-handed. Peerless child
Of the fast ageing year !

Two weeks have flown
On swift, yet sometimes lagging pinions—to
The weary-hearted—since the bitter night
Whose waning, moon-lit hours we two—the girl
Who tasted then the first drops of despair,
And I who drank once more its brimming draught—
Watched, till the Dawn, swift-footed, cool, and pale,
Broke in the east ; and still we linger here,
And view the changing beauty of the year,
And marvel at the wondrous loveliness
The face of Nature takes 'neath Frost's caress.

The days to me have passed like many more
Of this most bitter year—with weariness,
And sighs, and sharp regrets for what my life
Has missed, and must, through the slow-dragging
years
Which stretch between the present, and the bound
Where time for me shall end, eternity—
Oh vast, and awful word—for me begin.
To Constance sadly too has come and gone
Each rounded day ; though she is brave, and bears

The new, sharp pain which in her life has come,
With silence, and the courage hearts alone
As strong, and young, and healthful as is hers,
Can bring to bear upon so stern a pain.
Yet there are hours when grief triumphant grows ;
When, locked within the silence of her room,
Or shut within the shelter of my arms,
She lets the gathered anguish of the days
Of longing, and of self-restraint, break in
The tears, and moans, and wild, tempestuous sobs,
Which for the moment ease the burdened heart.
She's sweet, and gentle, merry oft-times, still ;
But vanished is the buoyancy, the gay,
Glad lightness which before was hers. Her cheek
Grows daily more transparent, delicate,
And pure in tint and texture ; and her eyes,
So sweet, and so unclouded when I first
Within them gazed, seem larger, darker grown,
And sad, and grave, and wistful ; troubled, too,
Their outlook has become ; her step more slow
And listless is ; and all things speak to me
Of Grief's cold, crushing hand laid on her heart.
So heavily therefrom it presses all
The gladness and the spring her youth had known !

E'er came this blight upon her. Yet her face
Is sweeter, lovelier far, than ere it wore
The deeper grace which chast'ning ever gives ;
Though 'tis a loveliness that makes one sigh ;
So sad it is to find on face so fair,
So young, the seal Grief's signet has stamped there.

The morn that followed that dark night of pain,
To her, to me, brought calmness to us both—
The calmness which succeeds a tempest wild,
But leaves the sky as darksome as before,
With not one gleam of sun to gild it o'er.
It brought, beside, from Mr. Denham's hand,
A note, addressed to me, and which contained
The farewell and regrets he had forborne
To speak in person on the previous eve—
Save to the girl to whom it meant so much.
By some fatality she took herself
The missive from his messenger ; and I,
Who, looking on, beheld her face first flush
With vivid color, as she recognized
The hand in which the letter was addressed,
Then pale to deadly whiteness, as she saw
It bore my name, read the wild throb of hope,

And sick'ning faintness of despair, to that
Succeeding quickly, with a sympathy
Born of a knowledge of the cruel clutch
With which Despair doth grasp the heart, and hold.
She passed to me the letter, with no word ;
Then quietly withdrew, and sought her room ;
But left a pang within my heart, as well,
To know how high in hers grief's waves would swell.

To-day has been a strange and solemn day ;
And to another of our group has brought
A new and mighty pain ; to still one more,
A great, and perfect, and abiding rest.
Ah, truly, Sorrow's shadow broodeth dark
O'er all the land ! She touches with her wing
All hearts in turn—with gentle lashings, some,
With stroke that wounds and prostrates, many a one.
My heart is full of questions deep, to-night ;
Of marvelings at God's mysterious ways ;
And torn with grief for her whose glad young life
Has had upon it laid to-day, so deep,
And, to her blinded eyes, so dark a woe ;
And weary also with the lengthened strain
Which on its sympathy has been imposed

By this sad day's events.

The morning broke

In beauty almost marvelous, and till
The noontide came, grew lovelier momentarily,
With all the splendid softness which this month—
This peerless month, with opals crowned and decked—
Alone bestows on the maturing year.
The faint, fair Summer, dying fast, to-day
Has rallied all of her remaining strength,
And with a semblance of her olden health,
Sat on her scarcely abdicated throne,
And smiled upon her subjects. All her cheek
Was crimsoned with the lovely, hectic flush
Whose beauty is so fatal ; and her breath
Blew hot and fevered on our low-bent brows,
As at her feet we knelt, with loving joy,
To see the smiling Summer on her throne,
Where, peerless, she so long had reigned alone.

Fair Summer ! flushed with beauty and with pride,
Yet dying, slowly, ling'ringly, as dies
A maiden, 'neath consumption's fatal touch,
And grieves to leave the brilliant world, which seems
So good, and glad, and lovely, to her dreams.

So sped the morn in wondrous loveliness !
But ah, the noon disaster brought, and death.
Still hotter blew the Summer's fevered breath,
Till sultry all the atmosphere became.
The sky seemed blazing with a golden flame ;
A violet mist the distant mountains draped ;
The heavy air with waves of vibrant heat
Pulsated strong. And then there was a hush !
No leaf or flower stirred, so great the calm ;
No sigh of breeze came grateful to our cheek ;
The air was stifling in its heaviness,
And with electric fervors seemed surcharged ;
Dark, purple clouds rolled slowly up the west,
Tinged low with copp'ry bronze, and spread, and
spread,
Until they veiled the sun's great brazen face,
And twilight came at noontide. Still the hush,
If possible, grew deeper—darker still
The noon. Low rumblings, distant, muffled, rolled
Along the far horizon, and the gold
Of light electric slashed the sable skirts
Of the slow-rising clouds. Then woke the wind !
A sudden gust, imperative and strong,
Came, bearing clouds of' uprising dust along,

And shook the house its deep foundations on ;
The casements rattled, and the loose-swung blinds ;
The trees bent low, and tossed their massive arms
In anger or in fright ; the brilliant leaves,
Whose hold on life had grown so frail since touched
With the cold breath of frost, swung, circled swift
In high mid-air, danced on the eddy'ng wind,
Tossed hither, thither—in a brilliant shower
At last to green earth dropping.

Swiftly, now,
The black clouds upward surged ; a few great drops
Struck heavy on the roofs and flag-paved walks ;
And then our eyes were blinded by the light
That cut the gathered darkness like a knife ;
And simultaneously a heavy crash,
Succeeded by reverberating rolls—
As though God's chariot, with massive wheels,
Were sweeping o'er the bosom of the clouds—
Shook, to its lowest timber, all the house,
And struck us white with terror. Scarce had ceased
The echoing rumble of the first great crash,
Ere came another, and yet others still,
In quick succession foll'wing ; and the rain,
As though heav'ns windows open wide had swung,

And yet another deluge was begun,
In volumes downward poured.

The rushing rain ;

The fierce, wild onslaughts of the roaring wind—
Within the grasp of whose strong sweeping gusts
The massive trees seemed playthings—with the roll
And roar of thunder overhead, made up
A very Babel of confused sounds.
And in the height of the *melée* that swelled
So hotly in the outer world, two clouds,
Together meeting in mid-heav'n, in wrath
The falling raindrops turned to globes of ice,
Which dashed upon our windows spitefully,
And danced upon the hard-paved walks without,
Till they were white with hail-stones, lying thick
Upon each other on the dripping stones,
And, ruthless, cutting down the tender flowers
The frost had kindly spared.

We sat within

The parlor op'ning to the angry west,
And watched the tempest warfare.—We whose nerves
Are sensitively strung, with trembling starts
At every blinding flash of blue-gold light,
And every loud, terrific thunder crash ;

The gentlemen, with organisms cast
In firmer, sterner molds, admiring watched
The lightning's forkèd play, and joyed to hear
The thunder's grand reverberating roar.
And yet, I think a sense of awe on each
Was resting, as the elemental war
So grandly, yet terrifically swelled,
And, angry, beat upon our shelter frail,
Like show'r of burning shot on iron mail.

Together I and Constance on the broad
Old-fashioned sofa sat ; and Sylvia,
So sensitive to atmospheric change,
With quiv'ring nerves, and cheek with terror
 blanched,
Was nestled close within her father's arms,
Her face upon his shoulder hidden low ;
While Mr. Disbrow and his gentle wife
Sat side by side, and hand in hand, removed
A little space from others of the group.
We talked of Him who holds the lightning's chain
Within His mighty hand ; who guides the clouds ;
And doth control the force and sweep of winds,
So mighty and so terrible when loosed

From His restraining hold. And then we spoke
Of that dread scene when on far Calv'ry's hill
A God in human form gave up his life,
And died a shameful death to save a world
By whom He was rejected, scorned, and slain.
When darkness came at mid-day o'er the land ;
The earth was shaken ; solid rocks were rent ;
The graves gave up their sainted dead ; and in
Yon sacred Temple on Moriah's mount,
The mystic vail, so curiously wrought,
Was rent in twain from 'broidered hem to hem.
And so "the way into the Holiest "
Was opened once for all ; and once for all
On that great day our Paschal Lamb was slain,
And by His precious blood atonement made,
Not for His own, but for a whole world's sin.
No wonder that the noon was darkened then !
That open graves, and trembling earth, and rocks
Rent to their inmost hearts, should testify
The wrath of God at this most shameful death
Inflicted on His well beloved son,
By an ungrateful world.

We talked of this,
And other kindred themes, until at last

The fury of the storm seemed almost spent ;
The rain-drops gently fell ; the crinkling lights
More rarely and less dazzlingly flashed out ;
The thunder muttered sullenly and low
In the far distance ; and the roaring wind
Blew gently as a summer zephyr soft.
Far in the west a lovely patch of blue
Between light rifted clouds showed, azure deep,
And promised speedy sunshine. So our nerves
Relaxed their tight-strung tension, and we breathed
Once more with ease and freeness. Sylvie, too,
Her bowed head raised, and dared to look without
On the subsiding tempest.

From his arms

Her father gently put her then ; arose,
And, crossing to the window, wide the sash
Threw open to the breeze ; stood gazing out
Upon the dripping landscape, and the fast
Dispersing clouds, some moments ; then he turned
With pleasant words upon his lips—of what
I scarce remember—for just then the room
Seemed all one blazing, dazzling flash of light—
A mighty crash o'erhead, which seemed to us
To tear the roof from its supporting beams,

And fell the walls around us, struck and stunned
Our senses for one moment terrible ;
While, blinded and confused, we cowered low,
And hid our frightened faces from the light,
And waited for the mighty roll to cease.
A strong, sulphureous odor filled the air ;
And when, uncovering our eyes at last,
We upward glanced, a haze of light-blue smoke
Itself was lifting to the ceiling low,
And floating from the open casement.

Then

A piercing shriek of anguish through the room
Rang startingly ; and Sylvie, from the chair
Wherein she crouching sat, half stunned with fright,
A moment previous, quickly sprang, and rushed
Across the wide apartment. Foll'wing her
With eyes surprised and startled, on the floor
We saw her thrown ; then for the first perceived
A stalwart figure, prostrate, silent, lay
A little space the window from removed,
And slowly on our sense the meaning dawned
Of that last terrible report, and all
The dread and sorrowful results with which
It had been fraught.

The hour that followed this
Was one of such confusion and suspense,
I scarce recall its actions or events.
I knew the form insensate of our friend,
Whose cheery tones, just ere the fatal bolt
Was hurled within our midst, had pleasantly
Been ringing in our ears, was laid upon
The broad, low couch where I had lately sat ;
That Mr. Brown himself rode off in haste
To seek for aid from hands more skilled than ours ;
That everything which could by any chance
Avail to animate again with life
The form that lay before us motionless,
Was done—without result.

Cold, silent, still—
With lips that wore the pleasant, cheery smile
We knew so well, but parted not to speak
The kindly words we had been wont to hear ;
Or to emit the spent breath, whose last sigh
Had fluttered through them as the dread bolt came
And set upon them, in a moment's space,
The seal of an eternal silence—so
He, peaceful, lay ! the noble, kindly soul
Flown without warning to the God who gave !

Launched in a breathing-space upon the waves
Of that mysterious sea that knows no bound ;
His new name giv'n—the flask of life's wine broke—
Cut by Divinity from Earth's stocks free,
His barque rides light upon that mystic sea ;
And what to us remains—and must, until
We too are cut adrift from earthly blocks—
A great and unsolved myst'ry, is to him
Becoming clearer momentarily, as floats
His free soul onward o'er the waves of bliss,
Fast tow'rd the port of Heaven, where awaits
Surprises sweeter, grander, than his thought,
Bound in its fleshly house, had ever caught
Most faint conception of.

But while to him
The fatal bolt had brought abiding peace,
To his poor child it came with sorrow deep,
And anguish such as her young heart till then
Had scarce the meaning known or guessed. Awhile
She seemed half-stunned—incompetent to feel
Or realize the stroke which thus had made
The poor child doubly orphaned. When, at last,
She understood no efforts could avail
To bring the light of life to those closed eyes,

The tender words she loved to those shut lips,
Her grief indeed was bitter. On her knees
Beside the couch where lay the silent form
Of him who was her all, her head upon
His pulseless breast, she pleaded for one look—
One loving word—one smile—one dear caress,
To show he had not left her all alone,
In tones that touched us to the very heart.
And when, with no persuasiveness of word,
Or tone, or touch, she could prevail to win
From him the dear response she prayed, with one
Heart-breaking moan she staggered to her feet,
And with wrung hands, and faint, unsteady steps,
Paced the apartment's length.

I drew her then

Within the clasp of my encircling arm,
And led her from the room, and up the stairs
To my own chamber, where I tried to soothe,
With tearful sympathy, her bitter grief.
Awhile she rested quiet in my arms ;
Then, stung anew with her bereavement's pain,
She started from my clasp, and paced the room,
With hot, rebellious words upon her lips,
And quick, convulsive sobs that brought no tears

To give relief to her o'er-tensioned heart.
Her eyes were wide ; her little hands were ice ;
Her face, so deadly pale, wore on each cheek
A spot of vivid crimson ; and her lips
Were white and drawn in agony that found
No vent in grateful tears.

“ He is not dead !

Oh dear Miss Wheaton, say he is not dead ! ”
She wildly sobbed. “ I cannot bear to know
That I shall never hear his voice again,
Or feel his arms around me ; never see
The dear, sweet smile he always wore for me.
I *cannot* bear it—cannot ! He is all—
All that I have in this great, cruel world !
I can't be all alone—all, all alone !
I'm but a child. Oh, say he is not dead !
God could not be so cruel as to take
All that I have, and leave me so alone,
With none to love me as he loved—*not one.*”

I for a time attempted no reply
To these wild pleadings ; for my heart was full—
Too full for speech, and I had thought perhaps
Her grief might spend itself in some degree,

In words that gave expression to the thoughts
Which struck their sting so deeply in her heart.
Nor was I wrong. At last she seemed more calm ;
Then I persuaded her to rest awhile
Upon my bed, and sitting by her side,
I took her soft, cold hands in tender clasp,
And gently said : “ My child, I know it’s hard ;
That it seems cruel to your stricken heart
That God should thus bereave you ; but, my love,
He’s *never* that ; He grieves to wound you so ;
His tenderness is reaching out to you,
To clasp you in the arms of greater love
Than that you just have lost. ’Tis hard to us ;
We cannot see why one so blameless, pure,
And upright in his character and life,
Should be thus suddenly called home to God,
His life-work seemingly left incomplete,
And you, whose need of him is great indeed,
Left lonely and alone by this sharp blow
Which takes him from you. But we know ’tis God
Who gives the stroke ; and knowing this, are sure
’Tis for a purpose wise. He looks beyond
The bounds our feeble vision can leap o’er,
And sees the issues which the future years

Shall gather in their grasp ; and so He knows
What for our dear ones shall be best ; so acts ;
He has but stepped into the lower room,
And bidden him, your father, higher come,
To this great feast of love He has prepared.
It is not wrong, but *honor* God has done
Your dear one, Sylvie. He's but summoned him
To taste of pleasures that shall never pall ;
New, full, rich, measureless, and perfect all."

The child had listened silently, but now
She drew her nervous hands from out my hold,
And clasped them tightly o'er her throbbing head.
"I know—I know 'tis well with him," she said,
While o'er her face a spasm deep of pain
Came, leaving lines of agony set plain—
"But oh, for me—what shall I, *can* I do !
How can I live without him—all alone
In this great world, with none to love me more—
To care for me, or guard me—me a child—
No father—mother—none who is my own.
I know God loved him well, for he was good,
And served Him faithfully ; but oh, to me
He's cruel, *cruel* thus to take my all,

And leave me so alone."

Ah, thus it seemed
To me, as well ; or would, had I not known
God never errs, and loves e'en while He smites.
I felt how poor were words to soothe such grief ;
But still, with quiv'ring lips, and aching heart,
I made attempt some comfort to impart.

" ' Like as a father pitieth a child '
So God doth pity you ! " I softly said.
" Nor doth He willingly afflict. My love,
You are His child ; dear to His heart divine—
Aye, dearer far than to that tender one
Whose every pulse responded to your own,
Until God's hand was on it laid, and hushed
Its throbbings to eternal stillness. So
He could not to His own be cruel. No !
In love He's given you this bitter blow,
With purpose wise we must believe, although
We in our blindness cannot see it now.
'Tis whom He loves He scourges ; only those !—
Like as a father chasteneth a child,
Who finds it hard and bitter for the time,
But needful lessons doth acquire thereby.

Nor are you all alone. A mighty arm
Which doth uphold 'the government of worlds,'
Holds you in clasp most tender. And no harm
Can e'er approach one who is sheltered thus.
An eye of love, unsleeping, watches o'er
Each guardless moment of your day or night.
A hand all powerful, all tender too,
Directs—and *will*—your steps where'er they lead ;
Nor can they fail or falter, guarded thus.
Not lone then, darling ; for our 'God shall give
His angels charge concerning thee,' to keep
All danger from thy path."

Her eyes on mine
Were fixed in thoughtfulness, the while she heard,
And pondered what I said. I feared to her,
Till now a careless and unthinking child,
These truths, so great and beautiful, would seem
But empty words, which had no life to her.
So I was glad, e'en for a moment brief,
They held her thought, and quieted her grief.

At last she clasped her hands across her eyes,
And murmured low : " Ah, that seems so unreal ;
I can believe it, but it's hard to feel

I thus am loved and guarded. 'Tis not like
His arm that clasped me with such tender love ;
His guiding hand that ever would remove
All evils from my path. And oh, to think
It's from me gone forever ! that no more
Through all my life, I can the loving care
Which so has wrapped and blessed me, know or feel !
That I shall never, *never* see him more—
My papa—oh, my papa ! ”

In a moan

The last words died, and all I'd said seemed vain ;
Nor could I wonder, while this new sharp pain
Tore at her heart so mightily and strong.
I laid my face beside hers, pressed my hand
With tenderness upon her burning cheek,
And for a little moment spoke no word.
And then I said : “ No, dear, he is not gone
So far away you ne'er will see him more.
A little while—it seems o'er long just now,
I know, my child—but still a little while,
And you shall meet to sever never more.
All pain, all parting shall be over then ;
And on through endless ages, you shall know,
And shall enjoy the love that blessed you here,

And which you'll miss but for a little time,
And then find, pure, perfected."

"Ah, who knows !

I am not good—as he—I may not gain
The place where he has gone—where pain, you say,
And parting ne'er is known !" she cried.

"You may,

If such your wish. God will not turn away
From you, His child, when you shall seek Him,
dear.

He'll fold you quickly in His love's embrace,
And give you tend'rest welcome."

O'er her face

A faint light broke a moment ; then she said :
"But even then I might not know or find
Him I so love, or he might be so glad
With years of Heaven's delight, and its content,
He'd care but little for the child he left
So lonely in this world."

"My darling, no !

That could not be ! and so I'm sure you feel.
Love is perfected there, pure from all dross
Of worldliness, and selfishness, and all
The human passions that make love's alloy

As now we know it. If he loved you here,
He'll love you better there, believe me, dear !
E'en Heav'n's rich gladness will seem incomplete,
I feel assured, till at the Savior's feet
He low can bend, presenting you, his child.
And in the cycles of Eternity,
Earth's lengthened years are passing short and few ;
So what seems long to you, to him will be
But briefest space in Heaven's measured time;
Not long enough to bring forgetfulness
Of you he loved so well—nor now loves less.
Nor will you fail to know him there—or find.
Freed from its hamp'ring, clogging robe of flesh,
The spirit's pow'rs must surely know access
Of versatility, of knowledge, strength,
And apprehension, rather than decrease.
We shall know *more*, believe me, and not *less*,
When all that loves, remembers, understands,
Shall be no longer bound by fleshly bands.
And though Heav'n's spaces may be vast indeed,
And numberless their inmates, yet when freed
From all that clogged it here, the spirit's wings
Will buoyant bear it through ethereal space,
And you shall see again your father's face,

And hear once more the dear, familiar voice—
Together through Heav'n's ages to rejoice.”

“That all is good, I know !” she, fretful, said,
After brief silence. “But it is too deep
For my distracted thought to comprehend,
Or my poor aching heart to realize.
Forgive ! I cannot help it. All I now
Can feel or know, is that I've lost the world ;
That *he* has gone and left me here alone ;
That while to others countless friends are given—
Parents and sisters, brothers, cousins, all
The dear relationships of home, from me
God now has taken all I had—the one
Who took the place of these—and left me lone.”

I sighed. I thought I'd spoken simply, what
Should give her comfort in her grief, and felt
I signally had failed. But now I see
I had expected of her o'er-wrought brain,
And troubled heart, too much. I had forgot
That what was plain to me, would come to her
As new, deep thoughts which needed pondering,
Ere she their fullest meaning could take in ;

That now her mind was too confused, her heart
Too sore this to appropriate, and gain
Therefrom the needed comfort ; but I think
That what I said, and she so earnestly
Had listened, will sometime recur to her,
With all the force and pow'r the thoughts may own,
Though now they seemed but wasted words alone.

Some moments passed ere I to her replied ;
And then I said : “ My dear, I know it's hard !
My heart aches for you more than I can tell.
I know just what it is—how sharp the pang—
To feel one must resign what gives to life
Its sweetest flavor, most enduring joy,
While others grasp, and, careless, drink at will
The draught of sweetness life to us denies.
'Tis hard, and bitter. Hard to be resigned.
But ah, we have no choice. Imperative
The *must* God speaks to our rebellious hearts.
If to His will we bow submissively,
He comes and gives us comfort in our pain ;
Binds up the wounds His hand, reluctant, made ;
And with His love oft ‘ makes the balance good.’
I know how hard it is that you should lose

The one dear friend who took the place to you
Of every other ; and I would not, dear,
Reprove you for the grief one must endure
When ties so strong and sweet are broken thus.
Nor yet would God. Christ wept, Himself, to know
His friend beloved was lying in the tomb,
Though in His word the power dwelt to break
The seal of silence Death had set upon
The rigid limbs of him He dearly loved.
But though to me, as you, it seems that God
Has chosen one to swell the ranks of Heaven
Whom earth can illy spare, we still must feel
He knoweth best. His counsels cannot fail.
His wisdom cannot err. 'Twas *he*, your dear,
Your loving father whom his God required—
Not mine, nor Constance' ! yours ! I cannot tell—
I would not dare presume to question how
Or wherefore it is thus. It is of God !
It is, and *must* be right ! ”

She turned away,
And covered with her hands her ashen face,
And made no answer. From the table near
I took a book, and op'ning it, I read
In low, soft, even tones, what seemed, or was

The further utt'rance of the thoughts my lips
So feebly had expressed. I knew, indeed,
She in their fullness scarce would comprehend
The words I read, but still I hoped she might
Sufficient grasp to hold her troubled thought ;
And that my voice, in intonation low,
Might lull her to the blest repose of sleep,
Which she so sorely needed.

For the most

She quiet lay, and listened while I read.
Sometimes she tossed in restlessness, the while
Her face took on the rigid lines of pain ;
And then some word would catch her thought again,
And quiet would return. At last, sweet Sleep
Bent down and softly kissed her ; and her brow
Reposeful grew, and calm. But 'twas, indeed,
Most pitiful to see the childish face
So pallid, and so worn ; the circles dark
Beneath her closed eyes pencilled ; and the lips
So sweet and merry, drooped with sadness deep,
Not banished even by the kiss of Sleep.

My book dropped from my hand ; and with a sigh
Of weariness, and of relief, I leaned

My head upon the cushions of my chair,
And sought for heart and brain rest from the strain
The last hours had imposed.

I glanced without.

The landscape peaceful lay, as though no storm
Had swept its fury o'er it since the morn,
And in a moment's space dealt death to one,
And to another of our little group,
A living, lasting grief.

The day had drawn
Serenely tow'rd the evening ; and ere long
Prepared to drop into the arms of Night.
I, resting, watched its beautiful decline ;
While thought, spent by exertion, scarcely stirred,
Or formed itself into one conscious word.

So waned the day ! Far in the lovely west
A globe of dead red molten gold swam deep
Within a sea of vi'let mist. Above,
Rifts in the purple edged with burnished gold !
And higher still, light waves of pearly gray,
And palest amber on a faint sky lay.
All the horizon, from the pale, cold north,
To where the sweep of sun-touched south embraced

The willing east, soft tints of vi'let cloud !
And on the zenith, fleecy, pulsing waves,
Rippled with golden white, and shading out
To delicatest grays, which deeper grew
As farther from the setting sun they flew !

So died the day ! And as the sunset light
Fast yielded to the gray of coming night,
My sleeping charge awoke. She did not stir,
And I was startled, when I glanced at her
Not knowing she had wakened, to perceive
Her wide eyes fixed upon my face, surprise,
Inquiry, and a sense of trouble vague
Within their azure depths. I softly smiled,
But spoke not. Then I saw a consciousness
Of this disastrous day's events, slow dawn
Upon her clouded mind. Her childish brow
With pain contracted ; and her sweet, drooped lips
Grew tremulous, as, shutting in her hands
Her quiv'ring face, with one low moan she turned
Upon her pillow, while the sobs that came
At recollection of her grievous loss,
With violence that shook her tender frame,

Brought with them plenteous tears. Kind sleep had
given

A healthier tone to her distracted mind,
And over-burdened heart. And now her grief
Had found the medium of relief, which is,
To youth at least, so natural.

And still

I spoke no word, but left her to her tears,
Till partial calmness was again restored.
And then I soothed her with caress, and words
Of sympathy, and tenderness, and cheer ;
Assurance of God's goodness and His love ;
Of her dear father's happiness and weal.
To which she listened, sometimes with renewed
And anguished bursts of tears ; but in a mood
More gentle and receptive than before,
And more submissive too.

She's sleeping now,

In quietness, on yonder couch ; while I,
With nerves still quiv'ring from the strain intense
Imposed upon them through this lengthened day ;
And with a whirl of thoughts and questionings
Revolving tirelessly within my brain,
All through the midnight's deep, unbroken hush,

Wake still—unwisely, well I know, for on
The morrow we shall bid adieu to all
The deep'ning splendor of these mountain wilds,
And with the poor, bereaved, and sorr'wing child,
Whose helpless youth, and utter loneliness,
Appeals so strongly to our sympathies,
Again our far homes seek. Great then my need
Of sweet, reposeful slumber, to restore
Both physical and mental strength once more.

And still I wake : with wonderings at God's
Strange ways of working ; counsels that to us
Are truly past all finding out : with thoughts
Which forward press into the future days,
Through which yon lonely child must tread, with
none

To guard or to restrain save Him whose care
Seems so unreal, intangible to her :
With all my own past sadly rushing back
Upon my shrinking heart, to know how soon
Home scenes, familiar, dear, will greet my eye ;
And standing in the room whose every niche
With old associations is replete—

Associations sweet and painful too—

The pain I there have known shall feel anew.

And yet my heart leaps wildly, as I think
I may perchance behold *his* face so dear ;
The pleasant voice whose lightest tone to me
Is music's own, I once again may hear ;
And look within the eyes whose glance I ne'er
Or cold, or careless found. And still I know
It were not best for me, or him, that so
We two should meet ; and still my human heart,
Filled, thrilled with the intense of human love
Which has for him its object, with a might
No force of will can perfectly control,
Longs for his presence dear, longs for the depth
And perfectness of sympathy, which he,
And he alone, has pow'r to give to me.

The night is still, and calm, and pure, and sweet ;
With myriad star-worlds lighted, and perfumed
With flow'rs of Autumn, and the scent of leaves
Whose blood is chilled and stilled by Autumn frosts.
The midnight calm its contrast to the deep
And powerful unrest which throbs within

My thought-stung heart, strikes sharply on my sense,
And makes my restlessness yet more intense,
Till with a sigh of pain I turn away
From the oped casement, and my tired frame lay
Upon my couch, and wide-eyed, wait the day.

PART FOURTH.

COMPENSATION.

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COMPENSATION.

I.

“ Separation had but sweetened love,
And joy of meeting recompensed the pain
Of parting and of absence.”

“ The rose is dead, the fancy broken !”

A ROOM with shadows dusky, though the noon
Is pulsing warm and brilliantly without !
An open desk, with many papers strewn !
Piled manuscript thrust carelessly aside !
Books heaped around ! an open window near !
And I, an idle pen within my hand,
Borne on the wings of rev'ry to a land
Of images unreal, where the ghosts

Of checkered days gone by, and footsteps still
Of those to come, are wandering at will !

Without, a world one flush of loveliness !
The trees luxuriate in their flatt'ring dress
Of tend'rest green, looped up with garlands white,
And faintest pink, whose perfume fills the air
With palpitating sweetness ; while the snow
Of falling apple-blooms lies white upon
The verdant cov'ring of the orchard's feet.
The lawns are velvet, bordered deep with beds
Of tulips gay, and sweet-breathed hyacinths,
And pansies, lifting up their faces grave
And beautiful with "thoughts"—perchance of all
The mysteries which wrap the birth of flowers,
And flutter through their frail life's fleeting hours.
The lilac buds are op'ning purple eyes,
And only half awake, gaze with surprise
Upon the beauty lying all around.
From trellised balconies, and house-eaves tall,
The fluttering wisteria to the breeze
Flings out the color exquisite that tints
Its drooping, rounded clusters. And more sweet
Than all, deep hidden in the springing grass,

Blue violets are drooping, fair and shy,
And breathing fragrant welcome to the spring,
And whisp'ring they are "faithful," while they
teach

A lesson of humility to all
Who read their open faces. In the woods
I know the fragile wind-flow'r is abloom ;
The sturdy ferns unrolling feath'ry fronds ;
And all the world of verdure is awake,
And rife with tend'rest beauty.

Knowing this ;

And gazing on the loveliness without,
Which feasts my eye with pleasure most intense ;
And breathing the delicious air that floats
In fragrant softness through my half-closed blinds ;
And listing the rich trills of building birds,
Whose music fills and ravishes the ear,
What wonder if my idle pen is dropped,
My half-writ sheets pushed carelessly aside,
And yielding to the dreamy, witching tide
Which on its bosom bears the wakened Spring,
I work no more, but fill the passing hour
With dreams that hold me by their magic power.

Oh wondrous waking of the sleeping Year !
Oh lovely starry eyes of many a hue,
Which open coyly on the wooing world,
And in its face smile back with tender joy !
Oh flower-lips, which by the sunny Spring
Kissed into consciousness, breathe back again
The fragrance buried in your chalice hearts !
Oh tuneful choir, which come on buoyant wing,
Obeying, glad, the mandate of the Spring,
A tribute of melodious song to bring—
We give you welcome, joyous and sincere,
And greet with you the waking of the Year :

Wrapped close in dreams, whose magic, filmy folds
Clung round me, shutting out the present hour—
Save as its charm of sight, and scent, and sound,
So subtly, yet almost unconsciously
My senses penetrated—dreams in which
The sadness of the present and the past
Inextricably mingled, I scarce heard
The op'ning door, or rustle soft of silk,
Or footsteps light upon the carpet pressed,
And started when across my eyes were laid
Gloved fingers, and a laugh, low, soft, and sweet,

The utter silence broke. I caught the hands
From my imprisoned eyes, and looking up,
Beheld, surprised, the lovely, laughing face
Of Constance bent above me. Then she stooped
And kissed me softly, and I rose to give
A warm and cordial greeting to the girl,
Whose lovely face I had not looked upon
In many months till now.

“Dear child,” I said,
As holding her aloof, I looked within
Her deep and smiling eyes, and noted there,
A wondrous brilliant light, while on her cheek
A faint flush rested soft. “I am more glad
To see you here than words have pow’r to tell.
You are as welcome as the flowers of spring ;
And, like them, back to me the fragrance bring,
And thoughts and memories of other days.
I am *so glad* to see you once again,
And see you bright and joyous as of old.
I’m sure you’ve something pleasant to unfold.
I read it in your eye, and lip, and all
The bright expression of the face I learned
So perfectly, in every varying mood,
Almost a year ago.”

She laughed again,
And deeper on her cheek the rose became,
And then she softly said : “ You’ve read aright.
God has been good to me—so good ! and giv’n
My heart’s desire, unworthy as I am
Of happiness so perfect and entire.
And as I came to you, and on your breast
Sobbed out my grief when it was new and fresh,
And, for the first, learned how divine a thing
Is sympathy, from one who through a deep
Experience of suffering knows how
To feel for others who are sorely tried,
So now I come to you with my great joy,
And know your sympathy in that will be
As perfect, and as deep, as in my hour
Of bitter pain.”

“ Not through experience, though,”
I answered, with a smile for her, and for
Myself a sigh. “ For on the other side
Joy, like the Levite, passes by, nor brings
Her soothing oil and wine to heal my wounds.
But I am glad, dear, if to you she proves
More gracious, and more kind. I can rejoice
In your deep happiness as perfectly—

Aye more, perhaps, than if 'twere mine as well.
For joy, like grief, is selfish, and it oft
Wraps its possessor so within the world
Of its own thoughts, desires, and hopes, they find
No place for other's miseries, no place
For other's happiness to creep within.
But tell the story, dear, I wait to hear,
And be assured it gives me pleasure deep
To know the night is past, and day is come
To gladden your young heart."

Her eyes were dim,

Her sweet lips trembled as she made reply :
"My dear, dear friend ! oh, I had hoped these months
Which have been kind to me, had brought to you
Their treasured joys as well ! that sweet content,
And peace, and, better, *happiness*, and hopes
Brought to fruition, had to you, dear, come,
And given back youth, hope, ambition, all
Which was by sorrow stricken from your heart
When last we parted."

" Well, the months for me
Have something done," I answered. " But of this
We'll later speak. Just now I'm wishing, dear,
The story of your happiness to hear."

“’Tis brief and simple, but it means—*so much!*”
She made reply, the while a lovely flush
Crept to her blue-veined temples. “It is scarce
Three weeks since I was both surprised
And, more than pleased, delighted, to receive
A call from Mr. Denham, who, not since
That bitter night we parted by the gate
Among those lovely mountains, had I seen.
Awhile I was so glad I scarcely thought
Of that great barrier which between us lay,
And fear I showed my gladness all too plain.
When recollection came to me at last,
And I had fain the question of him asked
If he were ‘Benedict, the married man,’
My trait’rous tongue the words refused to form ;
For well I knew it were impossible
I should the query carelessly propound,
Or playfully, as I would fain have done.
And so I nothing said, though all my thought
Around the question hovered, which my lips
So utterly refused to shape in words.
So came a grave restraint my manner o’er ;
Which he, perceiving, soon arose to go ;
And as he took my hand to say farewell,

And gravely looking in my upturned face,
Read in my eyes, I think, the query I
Had wished to utter plainer, smiled, and said :
' When last I saw you, on that lovely eve
Among the mountains, when I said good-bye,
Perhaps you recollect I asked beside
Good wishes for another—her, my bride,
Who held my promise, and to whom I went
Short space thereafter, with the full intent
Most loyally my promise to fulfill.
'Tis true I had ere this a struggle, brief
But strong, with will and inclination held ;
But I had triumphed, and most loyally,
As I have said, I sought my promised bride,
My heart close shutting unto all beside.
I found her—changed ! her cheek was pale and thin ;
Her eyes now held a restless light within ;
And though she strove to make her greeting kind,
And even tender, as had been her wont,
'Twas all so forced I could not fail to see
That she was changed indeed, and changed to me.
The pang was sharp with which I faced the truth,
And understood that in the few brief weeks
Since we had parted, love, the love built up

Through many months of pleasant intercourse,
Had fallen prone, and now in ruins lay
Before our conscious eyes. Awhile I still
Beside her tarried, waiting patiently
To be assured this was no passing mood,
Which should ere long give place to one more kind,
And show her still unchanged. But all in vain ;
Her health seemed failing rapidly, and she
So fretful grew I scarce had known the girl ;
While it was plain she shrank from each attempt
Of mine the old relations to resume
Between us late existing. But at last
I found the clue, and all to me was plain.
We met one evening one, who, till that hour
To me a stranger, seemed a certain power
O'er her who was beside me to possess ;
For quickly o'er her cheek the white and rose
Each other chased, her manner grew constrained,
And white and tremulous the lips with which
She sought the lively chatter to sustain,
Which should her strange embarrassment restrain.
I made no comment ; but, the foll'wing day,
I sought an explanation of the cause
Of change so marked as over her had come.

She grew so white I started with alarm ;
But rallying all her force of strength and will,
She frankly said, ‘ Yes, Dane, I’m changed, I know.
The love I thought you had possessed entire,
Another claims and holds, spite of desire
And effort on my part to keep it yours.
You’ll say I’m false and fickle. It may be—
But I have *sought* to constant be, and true ;
And query sometimes were it not less false
To break the promise I have made to you,
Than, keeping it, permit you to possess
A wife whose heart no longer is your own.
This query you shall answer. If you wish,
The whole truth knowing, I will keep my word,
And, wedding you, my utmost power exert
To make your home life happy.’ With a sigh
Of deep relief, she paused, and I replied :
‘ Nay ! to God’s altar I will lead no bride
With falsehood on her lips. Could you the vows
So solemn and so sacred make, and know
Yourself to keep them pow’rless ? It is best
Since I no more your perfect love possess,
We part at once. I leave you free ; and pray
God through another may bestow on you

The happiness it seems I could not give.'
I bade her soon a long but kind farewell.
And so we parted—who had thought before
To walk through life together, hand in hand,
Till we should reach the other, fairer land.'

"This was the story which he told, as we
Together stood, my hand in his, my eyes
Wide with inquiry, and a soft surprise,
Fixed on his face. He finished with a sigh,
Resuming in a moment : ' I confess
Awhile I felt a stern and sharp regret
At this disastrous ending of a love
On which I'd built so many pleasant hopes.
And then another crept within my thought,
Whom I had sought to thrust therefrom before,
But now with warmest welcome was received ;
Another face before me came so oft,
That I began to question close my heart
As to its meaning ; and I found—' "

She paused,

But with a smile, and vivid blush, she soon
Continued : " Well, you guess the rest. The love
He had resisted with his utmost strength

While to another bound, had come at length
To be the strongest passion of his life—
So he declared. And so—he came that night
To learn if there were hope for him with me.
Of course you know he could not in my face,
Which treach'rously my every thought betrays,
Look long, and doubt his full success. Indeed,
I found that I should speak there was no need ;
For ere I scarce was conscious what he meant,
He in my eyes had read the wished assent
And sealed it—on my lips.

“Dear, I believe
That was the happiest hour I e'er shall know.
I'd taught myself to think of him as one
Forever lost to me ; as lost as though
I'd seen the grass grow green above his grave ;
As one whom for a moment I had met
In life's broad way—whose eyes had smiled on me—
Whose hand had clasped my own in pressure warm—
Whose gracious words had gladdened all my heart—
And who had then, regretful, said farewell,
And passed along the road that led so far
Away from that in which my feet must walk,
Where I should doubtless meet him never more.

'Tis true I used to think what it would be
To have it otherwise; to have him mine ;
To see him in my home, among my friends,
My true, acknowledged lover ; fancying
How he would please and win them ; and how glad
'Twould make my heart, to see him honored thus.
I used to fancy just what it would be,
To have him by my side amid the throng—
In all my walks—through all the lovely hours
Of quiet evenings, which so lonely passed—
As others have the one their heart prefers.
To dream of all the tender care I knew
He would surround me with ; the constant thought ;
The full companionship ; the pleasant speech
On all the joys and int'rests of my days.
And when I looked on others of my age
And circle, who were blest with care like this ;
And sweet association with the one
Their heart had chosen, with a keen wild pang
Of loneliness and longing, I would cry,
As struck the contrast sharply on my heart :
' Ah, why am I alone denied the joy
So freely giv'n to others ? why must I
Alone, walk lone and lonely through the world,

While others are surrounded by the friends
Their heart holds dear and precious ?’

“ Yet, since then,
I’ve sometimes thought I was not in those days
So lonely as I fancied ; that in truth
The best part of my dear one I possessed—
His *soul’s* companionship ; and that while I
So constantly in spirit summoned him
Beside me, list’ning to his pleasant voice,
Whose tender intonation, as sometimes
In that sweet summer, it had fallen soft
Upon my ear, I never could forget ;
In fancy feeling oft again the warm
Close clasp of his dear hand ; and now and then
The tender pressure even of the lips
Whose touch my own had known not, I could not
Be utterly alone ; and that he too
Must have the influence felt of all the thought,
And tenderness of sympathy I gave,
And constant sweet communion which my heart
In fancy held with his ; yet, at the time,
I did not see or feel this ; only felt
That I was lonely, *lonely* ; and deprived
Of all my heart desired. And when I saw

How lightly, carelessly, their crown of love
So many, many wore ; how recklessly
They risked, by petulance or coquetry,
Unreasoning exactions or demands,
The loss of what they had not learned to prize ;
How they abused the pow'r and influence
Placed in their hands, for selfish ends alone
Oft exercising it, regarding not
The preference or pleasure of the one
They yet professed to love, proud to display
The power which they fancied they possessed,
I used to think—Ah, not like this, had I
The precious gift of love used or abused,
Had God been kinder, and on me bestowed
The strong devotion of the heart my own
So ardently desired.

“ And yet the while,
I tried to teach myself, as I have said,
To think of him as one, though so beloved,
Yet ever lost to me ; nor did I fail
Entirely in so doing. Even as
I summoned him in fancy to my side,
So constantly, I used to say—Ah, yes !
The fancy's passing sweet, but 'tis, in truth,

A fancy only ; for another claims
The blessing which I dream of ; and apart
Must lie the paths which lead us through this life ;
But lead us ever upward, to the one
Where pain nor separation e'er is known.

“ And then to know that he was free, and *mine* !
That we had met again, to part no more !
That he was there beside me, all his face
Illumined with the love I had not dared
To hope would e'er be giv'n me—ah, my friend,
All I could think was, God is good, so good !
I have not this deserved, but oh, 'tis sweet
To know it's mine ; and God is good—*so good* !
And even in that hour, I think I felt
The months of pain, and struggle, and unrest,
That I had known since that late summer night
Which made my hopes a wreck, were not in vain ;
That dearer and more precious was his love,
And deeper, fuller now my happiness,
Than if so dark a shadow had not lain
For many months between us. I had scarce
Appreciated then the boon which now
Above all else is priceless. Nor had I

God's nearness and His love so realized,
Had I not drank of sorrow's bitter draught,
And turned to Him for comfort as I quaffed."

"And now He pours the nectar in your cup
Till it runs o'er with sweets!" I said with smiles.
"Be glad, my dear; but oh, be thankful too!
Nor e'er forget in His so priceless gift,
The kind and gracious Giver. May He grant
Long years of sweet companionship and joy
To you, and him who is your young heart's choice,
And who I know is worthy to receive
The blessing you so freely, gladly, give.
I pray no clouds between your hearts may come,
How dark soe'er the days may 'round you lower.
And may God's hand of goodness and of power
Lead you, and him, your whole life's journey through,
And then in Heaven unite you."

Saying this,

I, with a close embrace, and kisses warm,
Sealed my congratulations. Then she said:
"We've talked enough of me and my affairs.
Now tell me of yourself—of Sylvia—
And all the friends of whom I've heard no word

Since that sad day we parted."

" Sylvia

Is well, and lovely as of old," I said.

" You'd find her changed, mayhap, since those bright
days

Among the mountains, when she seemed, and was,

A merry, happy, thoughtless child alone.

We found her lovable and sweet e'en then,

But now she's more so still. Gay, arch, and bright

As is her fair face yet, sometimes there steals

A shade of chastened sadness over it,

Which makes it sweeter seem, and gives a touch

Of the pathetic to its loveliness.

Most tenderly is her dear father still

Remembered, and most deeply missed and mourned.

But she has grown submissive to God's will.

And has, like you, through suff'ring sweetly found

How full and deep the comfort God will give

To sorr'wing hearts, who for it will apply.

Beside, she too her compensation has,

In one who is to her a father, friend,

And lover, all in one. A somewhat grave

But noble-hearted man ; her senior, too,

By many years ; but he is true and kind,

And gently tender to the child who gives
His grave life all the sunshine of her youth,
And merriment, and sweetness ; and regards
With reverent affection him she deems
So wise, and strong, and good, she wonders oft
He should in her find aught he could approve,
Admire, or much less love. I think at first
Her sweet, sad face, and youthful, girlish form,
Clad in its heavy mourning robes, his heart
Touched with a tender pity, which soon led
To the diviner passion that now holds
The child as far more precious than all else
The world contains for him. I have no doubt
They would unsuited be by many thought ;
'Tis true indeed they're totally unlike ;
But she supplies to him the sweetness, grace,
And gayety his nature lacks, while he
Is what she greatly needs—a counselor,
A trusty guide, a wise and gentle friend,
No less than tender lover. So I feel
She's chosen wisely, and her happiness
In his hands is secure."

"I am so glad !"

Said Constance, as I paused. "The loneliness

To which her father's sad and sudden death
Had left her, has before me often come,
And filled my heart with sorrow for the child.
I'm glad indeed to learn she's less alone,
Less sad than I had feared. I might have known
God would take kindest care of one who had
But Him to guard and guide ! I am *so glad !*"

" You knew, perhaps, the wealth her father left
Took wings and flew away a few months since,
And left her scarce sufficient to supply
Her simple wants, till he shall take her home
To whom her troth is plighted. Then she felt
Her father from the evil days to come
Most kindly had been taken ; for she knew
That at his age it had been difficult
His fortunes to redeem ; so fancies she
God's purpose in bereaving her can see,
And for it loves and trusts Him all the more.
She may be right. God unto babes reveals
The purposes which He from man conceals."

" Yes ! God is good and wise. I feel its truth
Each day I live the more. But tell me, dear,

What more than all beside I wish to hear—
The issue of these months to you. You said
They had done somewhat for you, and I see,
If I may judge by yon close-written sheets,
Ambition has at least its wonted seat
Resumed, and Thought has brought you plenteous
spoils.

And by the way, a few days since, when we—
My friend and I—were speaking of the past,
Of you, and all the pleasant days we spent
Together in the mountains, with a smile,
He from his pocket-book a folded sheet
Of paper took, on which I read inscribed,
The poem which you recollect you wrote
On that last day we spent beside the lake,
And he at once appropriated, nor
Would share it e'en with me. Of course I saw
As I perused it now, why he had wished
No eye but his should view it. And he said
"Twas that, and words you playful spoke that day,
Which woke him to his danger, and away
From that too pleasant spot his laggard feet
Drove with such haste."

"I know !" I smiling said.

“I fully understood why from your eyes
He thus the paper guarded. That he saw
The danger of the hour, to you, at least,
If hitherto he had been blind. And so,
True to his honor, and his plighted faith,
True to himself, and you, he went away ;
And now, still true, and free, returns to say
The words he then withheld, which make to-day
Your happiness complete.”

“Not quite complete,
While over your dear face still rests the shade
Of sadness I had fondly hoped these months
Had lifted ;” Constance sweetly said. “But still,
I’m glad if it is lightened somewhat ; while
I hope the hour will come when joy shall chase
Each shadow from your heart, and life, and face.”

“Thanks ! though your hope I scarcely share,” I said.
“Hope in my bosom lies as still and dead
As on that night through which we watched for dawn.
I am resigned, or try to be at least,
To sorrow, and the dearth of happiness
My life has known and must. I try to lay
E’en that upon God’s altar, as of all

The gifts my heart can bring in sacrifice,
The costliest and most precious. When I read
God's stern rebuke to Israel of old,
For bringing of the poorest of their flocks
As offerings to Him, I asked myself—
Ah, is it thus with me? Do I withhold
The best of all that life has giv'n to me,
And bring Him only what no sacrifice
It is to offer Him? Does He require
I shall yield up my happiness, and joy
To give Him even that, if such His wish?
Be glad to suffer loneliness and pain,
And give Him all the sweetness I from life
Have so desired and sought? Be satisfied
To yield e'en peace, content, and hope to Him
If such His perfect will? Is it to this
He's bringing me by discipline so stern?
Is this the lesson He would have me learn
From this long year of pain? Ah, what indeed
More precious than my happiness, could I
Upon the sacrificial altar lay!
So, as I said, I'm trying hard to say—
' Ah, Lord, I bring Thee even that—resigned
To grief, and loneliness, and dark unrest,

And deep and constant sadness, if to Thee
My costly gift acceptable may be.' ”

“ A costly gift indeed ! I marvel not
You find it hard ! ” she said.

“ Yes, it is hard.

I have not yet obtained sufficient grace
To make it easy ; to be *glad* to give
All that makes up the beauty of a life,
Its comfort, or its peace. I have not yet
The outlook of the mountain summit reached ;
But I am climbing slowly—slipping back
Ah, all too often—lying where I fall,
Hopeless, despairing, with the old hurt wide,
And freshly bleeding still, until again
God's patient hand binds up the open wound,
And lifting, leads me slowly up the mount.
So, though the months have something done, and
wrought
A change effectual in my inner life ;
Although ambition has returned ; and pain
Is somewhat stilled ; though of the hopeless love
That blest and tortured so my heart and life
I'm wholly cured at last—”

“Cured !” she exclaimed,
With manifest surprise. “Ah, is it so ?
I had not dared to think e’en years could do
So much as that for you.”

“Yes, I am cured—
Cured of the *love* in one brief hour of time.
It seems almost a miracle, indeed,
To me, as I perceive it does to you,
But notwithstanding it is wholly true.
In one brief hour it lay before me, dead—
Killed by his hand who called it into life—
No more to stir, or to lift up its head
Against the heart which long had felt its sway.
The remedy was terribly severe ;
I had shrank from it, had I known, with fear ;
But well it did its work, and left me free ;
Free from the long, intense, unhealthy strain
It had imposed on heart, and nerves, and brain.”

“And you are glad so to be free ?”

“Aye, glad !

’Twas like a long, and fevered dream, from which,
Filled though it may have been with fancies sweet
As well as painful, one is glad to wake ;

Aye, glad to wake though waking be but pain.
So *I* was glad to waken from this dream,
Though 'twas to suffer stings of bitt'rest pain,
Of sharp humiliation and regret.
And glad at any cost, *at any cost*—
I speak advisedly—to feel my heart
Free from the thralldom of a love forbid,
Which in itself as pure as happier loves,
Could naught be but a longing unfulfilled—
A constant, sharp regret no time had stilled.”

“And now 'tis o'er ! it seems indeed to me,
As you have said, a miracle to be.
It seemed so great, so powerful, so strong,
I had not thought that it could die, for long.”

“'Twas strong, indeed ! The stronger, doubtless, too,
Because of that long peace my heart had known,
Ere *his* hand startled it to throbbing life.
You still remember, do you not, the storm
Which raged so terribly that last sad day
We spent among the mountains—whose results
So fatal were to Sylvia, and her
Beloved and loving father ? Do you still

Recall the hush, the deep, oppressive calm
Which just the tempest burst preceded? So
It ever is! the storm that follows calm,
Doth ever fiercest rage. And thus with me.
The calm in which my heart had dwelt so long,
But added force and fury to the storm
Of passion, and despair, and bitter pain,
Which o'er my clouded soul swift swept, when calm
Had turned to raging tempest, and the might
Of a forbidden love surged through my heart,
Blighting and ravaging, and leaving there
Disaster, wreck, and ruin. 'Twas so strong,
Not any pow'r of will, or deep resolve,
No effort, prayer, or struggle, had sufficed
To root it from my heart. No blow less fierce
Or terrible, no shock less great than that
It has sustained, could such a work have wrought.
I cannot tell you, dear—you must not ask
That I should give you details, for the task
Would be too great for my still shrinking heart.
Suffice it that there came an hour when low
Before me in the dust my idol lay,
Proved by its fragments made of common clay;
When prostrate fell my boundless trust in him,

My confidence, respect, the high esteem
In which I'd learned to hold him ; when I found
He had deceived me sore ; when e'en his love
I could no more believe in ; when the fair
Proud structure of my high opinion, formed
By study of his character and mind,
Lay with them all in ruins ; while the love,
So powerful and strong, all dominant,
And long unconquered, perished with the rest.
Twas terrible to me at one fell blow
To have all I'd believed in, trusted, loved,
Esteemed, and honored, stricken from my life ;
It had been worse if love had still survived
The death of confidence and of esteem.
Twas terrible to thus be wounded sore,
By that same hand which had so late caressed ;
To feel that he whom I had trusted so,
So honored, and so loved, *could* give a blow
Whose force had cut me to the very heart.
Yet not in this the sharpest pang lay hid.
The bitt'rest thought was his unworthiness ;
The sharpest sting lay in the fact that he
Had fallen from the high estate in which
I had been glad to hold him ; that where I

Had deemed him strong, events had proved him weak ;
That virtues I'd admired were but assumed ;
And that not e'en to honor him was left.
No wonder I was staggered by the shock !
No wonder that it needed all my faith
In God, and in humanity, to keep
From doubting all, since faith in him was dead !
Were he not true, ah ! who but must be false ?
Were he unkind, who but was cruel too ?
Could he betray, ah ! whom, whom could I trust ?
Were he so weak, where should I look for strength ?
And if he loved me not, whose love was true ?
Thus cut adrift from all I'd honored, loved,
And trusted with unwav'ring faith, 'twas sure
No marvel that awhile I felt afloat
On a wide sea of doubt, where I could find
No safe or peaceful harbor for my mind."

"No wonder was it, truly !" Constance said.
"But I'm bewildered, dear ; I cannot think
What blow that he *could* give could cut so deep,
So lastingly affect. What he could say
To you—what do—that could have wounded thus ?
Forgive me—I'm not curious—I would

Not have you tell me aught you would reserve ;
But I quite fail to understand how he
Could thus have killed, in one brief hour, the love
I know so strong till then."

Thus Constance said,

And I replied : " No word, no act of his,
In any hour which we together spent
In personal companionship, but spoke
Most plainly of the high respect, esteem,
And honor which he bore me. Never once
Was there to me aught said I could condemn,
Could censure or regret. Naught but gave proof
Of delicate regard, affection pure.
Had it been otherwise, he had not won
Or held the deep devotion of my heart
Which had for months been his ; I had not found
All efforts impotent to drive him forth
From that deep sanctuary he had gained
By unremitting kindness and respect.
No ! it was through another hand than his,
The blow he gave me reached and struck my heart.
Words he had spoken, pressed by circumstance ;
Acts prompted by the moment's stern demands,
Repeated, nothing lost in cutting force,

But fell with direful strength upon my heart,
Each one a lash that stung. The fatal ease,
The shrinking from unpleasantness, which was
His nature's greatest weakness, was the base
Of all the cruel wrong. To hide his love—
From others, not from me—he stooped to wear
The hateful mask of double-dealing, donned
As circumstance required.—He did not know
That was the one thing I could not o'erlook
In lover, or in friend.—To spare himself
I had been sacrificed, while me to shield
Had seemed his only thought. To spare his friend
He had defended, e'en at truth's expense,
A confidence which, had he been as true
To me as him, he had not thus withheld.
And with mistaken honor, when with these
Stern facts confronted, opened not his lips
For any word of self-defense, which should
On him, his friend, reflect.

“I shall not soon

Forget that hour when we stood face to face,
Who had that morning met, and parted too,
With wonted kindness, while I told him all,
And vainly hoped that he would speak some word

Which should restore him to the lofty place
He had so lately held in my esteem.
His face was ashen white, and deeply lined ;
One would have thought ten years of ageing time
Had to his life been added since the morn.
But as I said, he uttered no defense ;
And but assured me of the high regard
In which he held me still, and ever should ;
Protested he had failed in no respect
To me, in thought and in intent, at least ;
And added, as he turned his face aside :
‘ I might have known an ending such as this
Our friendship must have had !’ He might have
known,
When stooping to deceive, the day must come
When I should know, and knowing it, resent,
Whate’er had been his motive or intent.

“ If real love survives e’en shocks like this,
Mine was not real love. *My* loves are built
On firm foundation of respect, esteem,
And confidence unshaken by a breath.
Kill these, and love lies dead beside them. So
Lay *my* dead love that bitter, fateful day,

Begun in promise, ended in dismay.
Yes, all was *ended* now, forevermore !
The hope, the fear, the longing deep and sore,
The ache of heart, the sharp, fierce, constant pain ;
The bitter anguish of a patience vain ;
But oh, the desolation that it left !
The emptiness, the hopelessness ; the strong
And ever clamorous regret for what
My life had missed and never could obtain ;
The loneliness of heart ; the blankness which
The future seemed enwrapped with ; and a sense
Of all the love had cost me, in content,
And peace, and happiness, forever spent.

“ My cup was full, e’en to the fretted brim,
With bitt’rest rue. I felt the last drop now
Which it could bear was added, and that life
Could pour no more within it. Pride, I said,
Is surely dead at last, and so can need
No other blow like this ; it can no more
Lift up its hydra-head beneath a shock
Which by its force strikes to the very springs
Of Pride’s tenfold existence. To the dust
In deep humiliation I was bowed,

And felt that I could never rise again
To confidence in any human love,
Or pride in the position I had gained
By years of constant labor."

"Oh, my friend,
I know not how you bore it all, and lived !"
Said Constance, while the swift tears fell from eyes
Suffused with tenderness. "Or why your heart,
Which had already borne so much, broke not
Beneath the added burden."

"Ah, my dear,
Hearts do not break so easily, and mine
Is, as I told you, made of sterner stuff."
So I replied. "'Tis true indeed, awhile
I sank beneath the burden ; turned my face
Unto the wall, nor would be comforted.
Awhile I turned from all, distrusted all,
Since he had proved untrue, unkind to me.
Each prop on which I'd leaned seemed stricken from
Beneath me ; every hope dead utterly
Past all resuscitation. In all this
The only compensation that I found,
Was in the fact that love was dead as well.
For this ere long I proved to be the truth.

My heart long turbulent was quiet now ;
Its deep unrest, and constant longing stilled ;
Its sick'ning pain and passion almost spent.
The long, long strain was o'er ; and this indeed
Was something to rejoice at, though the blank
It left was terrible, and grew more deep,
As from the fearful shock I rallied slow,
And slow regained, in some degree at least,
As months sped on, my health and tone of mind.
Within a maze, or labyrinth, it seemed
To me my feet had been entangled long,
From which I saw no method of escape,
Till God Himself the tangling cords had cut,
And left me free at last. Yes, I was sure
His hand was in it all. I knew so well
My constant heart's tenacious hold upon
The love it once had cherished, that I knew
There was no hope of my escape for long
From all the anguish which this love involved.
So when I found that I was freed at last,
I felt no hand but God's had wrought a work
Which mine had proved so pow'rless to effect
Through many months of strife."

"A work that's wrought

So perfectly, the love ne'er stirs with e'en
A semblance of the life it once had owned ?"
Asked Constance then.

"As perfectly as that,"

I answered. "For awhile I felt for him
Who had been dear, naught save contempt ; and love
Can ne'er with that abide. Awhile I thought
But of the stab that pierced me to the heart,
And the relief it was to be so free
From all the pain and longing of the past.
But as the months sped slowly, and my mind
Regained its tone and balance, I began
To feel less strongly, see more clearly too,
And judge more justly, till I came to feel
At times most kindly toward him ; to wish
For reconciliation with the friend
Who *as a friend* I thought might yet be dear.
Yet, still the love stirred not. Instead, when back
Upon my heart the memory would rush,
Of all the confidence, and love, and trust,
I gave him, and the base return he made ;
Of all the agony I for his sake
Had in the past endured, I felt that *ne'er*
Could I his hand in friendship take again ;

And that for us there could not henceforth be
Aught but estrangement and indifference.
But time still sped, and wrought its changes deep.
'Tis difficult resentment long to keep
Tow'rd one for whom you daily ask good gifts
Of God, the gen'rous giver. So I found
Resentment melting, like the dew of morn
Beneath the sun's warm glory. So, ere long,
The sad estrangement came to hurt me sore—
A hurt that deeper grew each passing day.
While as my mind regained its health, the blank
The love in dying left, the loneliness,
The deep heart-sadness grew yet more intense,
Instead of lessening with passing time.
The injury he did me when he won
The love he had no right to wish or seek,
Is irreparable. I do not think
I *ever* can regain the place I lost,
When I, for love of him, my peace of mind,
Content, and hope, and happiness resigned."

"And this was he," said Constance, when a pause
Of thoughtfulness succeeded to the words
I last had spoken, "who ere this you'd thought

Impersonated all the virtues which
In man you most admired, and joyed to find
Embodied in his character and mind !”

“ Yes, this was he ! he who to me had seemed
My other self—my nature’s complement ;
He to whose heart mine had responsive beat ;
Whose face had ever softened ’neath my glance ;
In whose dimmed eyes I’d read a hundred times
A love that spurned control ; in whom I’d found
A depth of sensibility most rare ;
A sympathy and kindness which had ne’er
In any instance failed to give response
To such demands as I had on it made.
In all our intercourse naught had there been
But had appealed to all the better part
Of his man’s nature ; but had touched the springs
Of all that in it high and noble was.
And that was how, perhaps, I came to form
So high an estimate of him—because
He ever showed his fairest side to me.
I look back now, and see how skillfully,
With what fond wiles he won my willing love.
In all our intercourse, as friends—or more,

No word unkind, unflattering, or cold,
E'er crossed his lips to me, e'en though in jest.
Others might feel the shafts of satire, flung
Forth from his brilliant wit, and ready tongue,
But never I. Kind, tender, deferent,
And gen'rous ever he to me had proved—
What wonder I believed in him—and loved ! ”

“ It *was* no wonder, darling, I am sure !
Nor can I but believe he loved you well,
Although his conduct, as to you portrayed,
Might argue otherwise.”

From Constance this ;

And I to her replied : “ At all events,
I had not cared for him until I thought
I had, though all unknowing, won his heart.
Perhaps that was of his design a part
If it is true he with delib'rate art
Sought so to win me. I have thought, sometimes,
He saw the fire which smold'ring lay beneath
The outward calm and coolness, and perhaps
Desirous felt to own the conscious power
To fan it to a flame and learn its strength.
It pleased and flattered him, no doubt, to know

His touch, or word, or glance, could send the flames
High leaping in their pow'r ; to know the heart,
So cold to most, in every beat to his
Gave perfect and spontaneous response.
So if he loved me not, I must believe
He sought to touch the deep springs of my soul,
To win a love whose power he had guessed,
From vain and selfish motives—to amuse
And speed the passing hour. I know, indeed,
An imputation such as this he would
Resent with indignation ; and I feel
He gave me in those days too many proofs
Of strong affection, and deep earnestness,
To make it possible that *all* was feigned.
So, weighing all the past impartially,
And at this interval of time, I must
Believe the passion that I thought he felt,
Existed just as truly in his heart
As did my love in mine."

"You speak as though

Some time had passed since this dark trial came
Of which you just have told me—which has wrought
So marvelous a change within your heart.
Is that the case ? " asked Constance.

“ Yes ! ” I said.

“ Eight months, or nearly that. On my return
Last Autumn from the mountains, I was pleased
To find him home ; and once or twice we met
With all the olden pleasure, mixed with sharp
And unavailing pangs of pain, regret,
And longing, ere the storm-cloud burst that laid
My love and faith in ruins. Then again
He went away ; and from that bitter night,
Six months passed by, in which I saw him not ;
And from him heard no word which should reveal
If he were grieved, or glad, at what had been
A trial long and terrible to me.
And then he wrote, expressing deep regret
For all the past, which he would fain, he said,
Forever bury from his sight—and mine.
Forgiveness craving for whate’er had hurt
Or angered me, while claiming, in his heart
No such intent had ever found a place.
And certain points explaining, which in part
The aspect of his conduct changed, and showed
That he had erred from a mistaken sense
Of honor, often, rather than intent
To be to me ungen’rous or unkind.

Assured me of unchanged regard, respect,
And interest unfailing ; hoping soon
To meet me face to face, and in my eyes
Read the forgiveness he should truly prize.

“ Of course this letter aided to dispel
The mists of a resentment which ere this
Was slowly vanishing. For in these months
Which had elapsed since that eventful day
In which he fell so low in my esteem,
As I have said, I'd slowly come to weigh
More justly all the circumstances, all
The strong, impelling forces, acting on
A gentle, yielding nature, with results
So deeply fatal ; while I understand
More perfectly than any other could,
The pressure brought to bear upon his life,
In those strange days ere came our parting sad,
Of which I told you on that summer night
Whose morn still found us wakeful. I can see
Just where he erred, both to himself and me ;
Just how another course had brought results
So widely different, and kept my faith
And confidence intact. 'Twas natural

Awhile I naught should feel except the blow
His hand had dealt me ; nothing see except
The baseness of his conduct ; but I've come
To judge with greater leniency one whom
I had so closely studied ; in the main
The estimate then formed believing still
One which was quite correct. 'Tis true, indeed,
In some points it has failed ; the strength I'd thought
His nature held in some directions, proved,
When tested, only weakness ; yet again
In other points I've found him stronger yet
Than I had fancied. That his nature is
In fact a rarely sweet one, holding no
Resentments ever ; from all evil speech
His tongue close guarding ; capable as well
Of self-control that's marvelous indeed,
I've often to my satisfaction proved—
Rare gifts, and lovely, wheresoever found !
So while I do not, cannot e'er forget
The poor return he made for all my love,
And boundless trust, I do not therefore think
There is no good in him ; or that although
He's failed in some, in all things he's untrue.
'To err is human, to forgive divine.'

He's proved that he is human ; and since he
His wrong confesses, and regrets, and craves
Therefor forgiveness, I'm, I trust, divine
Enough to grant it freely. I believe
No man that lives is capable of quite
Appreciating woman's love, in all
Its wonderful intensity and depth ;
That none is fully worthy of the boon.
I know as well, that I expect too much
Of such as please me, and too oft forget
That since I cannot even make myself
What I would wish, I should not think to find
Another wholly to my liking. So,
Since in so many points he pleases me,
And as a friend is more congenial far
Than many that I meet ; since no one has
A character devoid of trifling flaws,
I'm satisfied to take him as my friend,
With all the faults I know, but cannot mend."

"A friend, who was a lover?" Constance asked.
"I've heard that 'friendship often turns to love,
But love to friendship, never!'"

"It is rare,

I know," I answered. "I myself had thought
It could not ever be ; but I have proved
E'en that is possible. Experience
Has taught me many things the past sad year,
Which I before had doubted. Still, 'tis true
He can to me be never quite the same
As though within my heart he had not dwelt
For many months, a loved and honored guest ;
As though I never in his face had read
The love I gave, returned. Ere that could be,
With all the rest must perish memory."

"Yet you no more regret him?" asked the girl.

"No—no—no more ! him, as I know him now !
Him, as I once believed him, even yet !
The *real* man never ! the *ideal* oft,
With deep, sore longing naught can still or check !
There have been hours when I had giv'n the world
Had it been mine, to have him at my side,
The man I once believed him, gen'rous, true,
Kind-hearted, tender ; in his soul no thought
I might not read ; no blot upon the past ;
No shadow dark between. For though 'tis true

I've learned that there were circumstances which
Extenuate in some degree his acts ;
That he has many traits of goodness ; still,
The fact of his duplicity remains,
And all the mem'ry of the dead past stains,
And through the present trails its serpent coils,
Each kindly action wrapping in its toils."

"Then you have met again since that dark hour
In which you parted ? " Constance asked.

"Since then

I face to face have stood with him again,
And looking in his eyes have seen therein
The olden light of tenderness ; have felt
The gentle pressure of his warm, firm hand
Whose touch is so familiar ; and my heart
Beat quietly, obedient to my will,
Nor stirred again with that impassioned thrill
Which once his lightest touch had wakened. Still,
But for the shadow of distrust which throws
Its darkness so between us, and the strong
Restraint I on my heart imposed, I'd felt
Perchance the tender charm which lately dwelt
In glance, and smile, and tone, and clinging clasp

Of pulsing palm, and all the subtle power
Of deep, magnetic harmony, which won,
And bound, and held me."

"Yet you think," she said,
"The passion you once felt is now so dead,
'That were you thrown together as before,
And he, as then, exerted all his power
The love to win he knew had once been his,
'Twould not avail?"

"Ah child, how can I tell?
The human heart deceitful is, I've proved,
And strangely contradictory. And mine
I know is but too constant to the loves
It once has felt; while doubtless what in him
Then pleased me, would be charming to me still.
So though I *think* the love for him which once
So potent proved, is dead, I cannot say
With certainty what might be. I have learned
That my own heart is still a half-read book;
And that I cannot tell what further leaves
When turned, may yet unfold. But this I *know*:
If we were thrown together as before,
And o'er my heart I felt the influence creep
I once had found so powerful and so deep,

I'd fight against it with my utmost strength ;
Each fond advance resist ; his presence shun ;
And shut him even from my lightest thought.
And if the love, in spite of all, still came,
I then would hold myself quite free from blame,
However I might rue it, grieve, regret.
And more than this : If one I could approve
In every way ; one free to win my love,
Were earnestly to seek it, I'd resist
All love's approaches with as great a care,
As though *his* hand had laid the tender snare.
Too terrible I've found love's cost to be,
To lightly dare again its mastery.
Nor do I think my often wounded heart
Could feel again in any man, the trust
That is affection's root. I know, indeed,
There *are* true men, who true in love may prove ;
But such are not for me—I'm done with love."

" Ah, darling," Constance said in trembling tones,
" When love from life is stricken, what remains
To give it worth and beauty ? "

" Little, dear,
To give it *sweetness*, truly ! " I replied.

“To me remains ambition—which indeed,
Is compensation poor to woman’s heart,
For what it misses, craves, and needs of love—
Life’s work to still fulfill as best I can ;
To toil with falt’ring feet along the path
Which to the gates of pearl still upward leads ;
And climbing, to give succor as I may,
To those whose steps along the rugged way
Are e’en less firm than mine ; and for the end,
To wait as patiently as I may gain
The strength to do, from trial and from pain.”

“Oh love, you fill my heart with sadness deep !”
And now beside me close the sweet girl knelt,
In that fond attitude she used to love—
Her arm around me clasped, her soft cheek laid
Upon my knee, her full eyes on my face :
“I cannot bear to think, while God to me
Has giv’n so much, who so unworthy am
Of such great joy, to you He still denies
The happiness you all your life have missed.
It breaks my heart to think, while I am glad,
That you, my darling, still are lone and sad.”

My eyes o'erflowed with sudden tears, as low
I bent, and kissed the girl with trembling lips,
And for a time responded not ; and then
I backward pressed the burning drops of woe,
And smiling faintly, answered : " Constance, no !
That must not be ! Be glad in your deep joy ;
Nor let my sadness add one drop of rue
To your full cup of wine. Of what avail
To let my grief your pleasure dim, since you
Are powerless to heal the hurt you rue !
You know the good old hymn that runs like this :
' Good when He gives—supremely good ! *nor less*
When He denies !' To you, in giving, God
Indeed is good. He, in denying me,
No less so doubtless is. And though, indeed,
I find it hard to always be content
With that denial which He sees is wise,
And long as greatly for the happiness
Which He withholds, as though I were not sure
He knoweth best, the *fact* remains the same—
That He is wise, and good, and what is best
Gives you, and me, and all. One who is sick
Believes the skilled physician, who prescribes
The nauseous potion, knows just what to give

That shall avail to work the cure he seeks :
So drinks submissively ; yet finds the draught
No less the bitter, and with wry face quaffs
The cup his hand presents. So I believe
God gives to each just what is best for each.
So with submission drink the draught which He
In wisdom mixes ; *but I find it still*
Most bitter to the taste. Be thankful, dear,
To you He pours out happiness, and drink
It wisely, gratefully, lest He recall
The precious gift, or cause it on your lips
To turn to poison."

"May God give me grace
So to accept, and drink !" with rev'rence grave
She answered. "But I shall not cease to pray
He will to you be gracious, and bestow
The boon your heart desires. *I cannot know*
That you are sorrowful, and still be quite
Content and happy, even in the love
Which blesses so my life. And since you drink
Submissively the potion He pours out,
I must believe it shall a perfect cure
At length work out for you."

"It shall, perhaps,"

I answered, “ when ‘ life’s fitful fever ’ has
Its long course run, and stilled the weary heart
So human in its longings, hopes, desires,
That while still flame the fev’rish, leaping fires
Of human life, it cannot find repose.
When to the life divine at last it goes,
The cure shall be perfected, and no more
Shall know of pain, regret, or longing sore.”

A brief pause on the converse fell, the while
The girl beside me showed her sympathy
Most sweetly by her tears. And then she asked :
‘ And have you then quite perfectly, at last,
The problem solved which vexed you so before—
What is the purpose of this long, sharp pain,
The sore temptation which you felt so vain ? ”

“ Ah no ! not perfectly. ’Tis still to me
A question vexed ; nor shall be solved, I fear,
Till God himself shall make the answer clear.
I’ve somewhere read ‘ If one aspires to be
A son of consolation, one must pay
The costly price of education meet.’
Perchance He saw that mine was incomplete,

And I unfitted to perform some task
He shall ere long require me to fulfill.
I've also read—and *know*, 'experience
Of strong temptation fits the heart to feel
For others who are tried ; to give such aid
And sympathy as may be needed.' So
Christ ran the gantlet of our human life,
E'en from the cradle to the grave, His pure
And sacred shoulders baring to the blows
Which through the bitter race thereon were show'ed,
That He might know, from having felt them all,
The trials and temptations which on us
So thickly crowd, and knowing, be prepared
To sympathize and save.

“ But, ignorant
What life's demands shall in the future be,
What stern, sad work God shall require of me,
For which He has the past long, weary year
Been educating me by trial strong,
And fierce temptation, and o'er-mast'ring pain,
To perfectly perform, I cannot solve
As yet to satisfaction, what so long
Has puzzled me—the mission of it all,
Although I add, subtract, and multiply,

And o'er and o'er repeat the process vain.
Since effort brings but failure, in His hands—
The wise and loving Teacher who the task
Has set—I try to give it now, assured
He can the problem solve, work out the sum,
And prove the answer true. He can as well,
If so it please Him—yonder, if not here—
Restore the peace and restfulness I lost
When on the waves of human longing tost,
I ceased to feel God's love is dearest, best,
And in that love, content, to sweetly rest.”

The day waned swiftly, and the evening came,
Soft, fragrant, pure—all streaming violet flame,
And rosy mist, and amber effluence,
And flower-balm and beauty.

 ✧ Then she went—
This dear, sweet girl ! her eyes soft with content,
Her red lips smiling with a joy which shed
Its sweetness through each pulse, whose throbbing tide
Was by her pure and tender heart supplied.

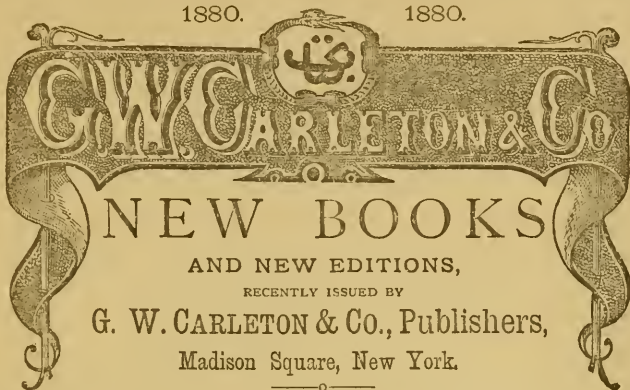
And as she went, I smiled—to see her glad !

And as she went, I sighed—at heart so sad
She, going, left me ! *Glad* and *sad*, I said—
“To her ’tis giv’n to grasp—me to resign ;
Mine is the draught of rue, and hers the wine ;
May He who pours them both make good to me
The balance—here, or in eternity !”

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